

inside

HOKI SPORTS

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SEIZING HER MOMENT

Tech standout Uju Ugoka has traveled a lengthy road to get to Blacksburg, but her work ethic and passion for hoops has enabled her to become one of the ACC's best players

WHAT'S INSIDE:

The Virginia Tech football team's season ended with a loss to UCLA in the Sun Bowl



Jimmy Robertson
Editor

Marc Mullen
Editorial Assistant

Bill Roth
Columnist

Tim East
Executive Editor

Dave Knachel
Photographer

Stacey Wells
Designer

Contributors
Terry Bolt - Hokie Club
Kyle Winchester - IMG

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"Thanks for all the support! Being a Hokie is a blessing!"

Austin Gabel
R-Sophomore | Wrestling

"Thank you for everything that you do for Virginia Tech and all of the sports programs!"

Brooks Morrison
Sophomore | Wrestling

GABEL GETTING IT DONE

Tech wrestler Austin Gabel went 5-2 at the Las Vegas Invitational to finish in seventh place at 174 pounds. Seeking a second straight NCAA bid, the redshirt sophomore from Parker, Colo., is 11-4 overall on the season and 7-2 in dual meets heading into the Virginia Duals on Jan. 10-11 in Hampton, Va.

The Donor File

Clay Whitley

HOKIE CLUB LEVEL: Golden Hokie

CURRENTLY RESIDES: Richmond, Va.

WHAT YEAR DID YOU GRADUATE? 1957

FAMILY: Kevin and Tracy Whitley (son and daughter-in-law), Linda and David Taylor (daughter and son-in-law), Brian and Kelly Whitley (son and daughter-in-law)

Grandchildren: Donald Clay and Garrett Whitley (Kevin and Tracy), Whitley and Harrison Taylor (Linda and David), Peyton, Cooper, Fletcher and Karsten (Brian and Kelly).



Q&A

Q: The Hokie Nation is real because ...

A: We have a great fan base. We also have teamwork among our fans and university administration to support the athletics program.

Q: What is your best memory of Virginia Tech athletics?

A: My best memory would have to be attending the national championship game in New Orleans after the 1999 undefeated season. A close second would be attending the West Virginia game in the same season to see Shayne Graham's game-winning field goal that preserved the undefeated season.

Q: What caused you to become a fan of Virginia Tech?

A: My first visit to Virginia Tech was when I was a high school student looking at colleges to attend. I loved the campus and saw an opportunity to get an engineering degree and a commission in the military as a member of the Corps of Cadets. After that visit, I was a Virginia Tech fan and have been a Hokie for 61 years.

Q: Describe your perfect day at Virginia Tech.

A: Have a safe drive from Richmond to Blacksburg. Enjoy ESPN Gameday live at Lane Stadium and pregame tailgating with family and friends. Watch the pregame and halftime activities including Corp of Cadets, Highty-Tighties, Marching Virginians, a flyover and "Enter Sandman." Win the game and have a safe trip home.

Q: How are you involved with the local Richmond Hokie Club?

A: I serve on the board for the Richmond Hokie Club. I have been chairman of the Richmond annual recruiting night program for several years and I enjoy working with club members on numerous other events during the year. Our club has supported the general fund, many individual teams and new facilities projects in the athletics department.

Q: I'm a Hokie Club member because ...

A: I enjoy helping to provide athletics scholarships and funds to improve

facilities to make the sports programs at Virginia Tech the best in the ACC. Athletics provides exposure to the university like no other medium and that exposure benefits all aspects of Tech.

Q: My all-time favorite Virginia Tech football player is ...

A: Carroll Dale. He was an outstanding tight end and was on the team when I attended Virginia Tech. He had a fantastic career with the Hokies and also a great career with the Green Bay Packers in the NFL.

Q: My all-time favorite Virginia Tech student-athlete from another sports is ...

A: Bimbo Coles. Our family lived in Lewisburg, W. Va., from 1973-1984 which is also Bimbo's hometown. Our children went to Lewisburg schools with Bimbo and we watched his athletics career through high school. He was a special player for Tech basketball, the U.S. Olympic team and he had a great career in the NBA.



The Hokie Club staff would like to thank the Hokie Club membership for their wonderful support of Virginia Tech athletics in 2013. We are committed to providing our student-athletes the finest possible support by paying for student-athlete scholarships, assisting in raising money to build first-class athletics facilities, and offering program support to our 22 varsity sports. During the year, we

welcomed new Hokie Club members and saw many existing members upgrade their giving levels. In addition, we received pledged gifts and major gifts that will be used to directly impact Virginia Tech athletics for years to come, both with capital projects and endowed scholarships. Thank you again for your support, and we look forward to a very successful 2014.



Supporting Tech Athletics Since 1949

Tech adds Purdue to football schedule

Virginia Tech and Purdue have agreed to play a home-and-home football series that begins in 2015.

The Hokies will travel to West Lafayette, Ind., for a Sept. 19, 2015 game against the Boilermakers. Purdue then comes to Blacksburg for a game on Sept. 9, 2023. Tech officials juggled a game with East Carolina in 2015 to fit in Purdue, agreeing with ECU officials to move a scheduled Sept. 19 game to Sept. 26. That game will be played in Greenville, N.C.

The addition of Purdue fills the

vacancy on the Hokies' 2015 schedule. The Hokies, who will play Ohio State, Furman, at East Carolina and at Purdue in 2015, have their future schedules filled through the 2016 season.

Coincidentally, the 2016 season marks the first meeting between the Hokies and Notre Dame. Tech will play at Notre Dame on Nov. 19 of that season.

Purdue marks the fifth Big Ten team on the Hokies' future schedules, joining Ohio State, Wisconsin, Michigan and Penn State.

Several Tech seniors to participate in all-star games

Tech quarterback Logan Thomas, defensive back Kyle Fuller and defensive end James Gayle are three of eight Tech players who are participating in postseason all-star games as they try to catch the eyes of NFL scouts in advance of May's NFL Draft.

Thomas, Fuller and Gayle agreed to play in the Senior Bowl, arguably the most prestigious of the all-star games. The Senior Bowl will be played at 4 p.m. on Jan. 25 at Ladd-Peebles Stadium in Mobile, Ala. The NFL Network will televise the game.

Linebacker Tariq Edwards, linebacker Jack Tyler and defensive end J.R. Collins all have agreed to play in the second annual College All-Star Bowl to

be held at 6 p.m. on Feb. 14 at Furman University in Greenville, S.C. CBS Sports Network will televise this game.

Defensive tackle Derrick Hopkins will be playing in the East-West Shrine Game held Jan. 18 at Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg, Fla. Hopkins will suit up for the West team. The game kicks off at 4 p.m. and will be televised on the NFL Network.

Receiver D.J. Coles has agreed to play in the inaugural Medal of Honor Bowl to be held at 2 p.m. on Jan. 11 at Johnson Hagood Stadium in Charleston, S.C. Coles will play for the National team. Funds from this game go to the Medal of Honor Museum Foundation and the Wounded Warriors Project.

Rankin leaves Tech basketball program

Marquis Rankin has decided to leave the Virginia Tech basketball program because of personal reasons. Rankin, who had been around the program and sat on the bench with the team during home games this season, notified Tech coach James Johnson of his intentions shortly after Christmas.

Rankin, from Charlotte, N.C., plans on staying at Tech as a student and working toward his degree.


"I completely support Marquis on his decision," Johnson said. "He is an outstanding young man who had to make a difficult choice, and I know that he took the time to make sure it was the correct decision. While we will miss not having him on the team, I am very happy that he has decided to stay at Virginia Tech and work toward his ultimate goal of a degree from our university."

Rankin, a junior, played in 53 games during his Tech career, starting 13 of them. Last season, he started seven of the 29 games in which he played and averaged 3.4 points, 1 rebound and 1 assist per game. He shot 39.3 percent from the floor.

For his career, he averaged 3 points, 1 assist and 1 rebound per game and shot 37 percent from the floor.

Soccer player earns program's first invite to MLS Combine

Tech senior goalkeeper Kyle Renfro was included among the nation's elite college seniors invited to compete in the 2014 adidas MLS Combine, as announced by Major League Soccer. He became the first Tech player to be invited to the annual combine, which was held Jan. 10-14 in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Renfro started and played in 63 matches since arriving at Tech in the fall of 2010. He accrued 14 shutouts in his career and boasted a .782 save percentage over four years of play. The Forest, Va. native led the ACC in saves the past three seasons and was named a first-team All-ACC selection and a second-team All-Region selection for his performance during the 2013 campaign. 

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editor's desk | by Jimmy Robertson

Considering the circumstances, 8-5 was not a bad season for Tech

In November of 1994, the former editor of the athletics department publication, Chris Colston, came up with a unique headline for the issue that capped the 1994 regular season. It said, "8-3 ain't bad."

Nineteen years later, the Hokies finished up their season with eight wins. While the season ended horribly, with a bad performance against UCLA in the Sun Bowl, it resembled the 1994 season – it wasn't a bad one. It just had a bad ending.

Tech lost four of its final six games (in 1994, the Hokies lost three of their final four, including a 45-23 loss to Tennessee in the Gator Bowl). Without quarterback Logan Thomas for almost three quarters of the Sun Bowl, Tech lost to the Bruins 42-12. Head coach Frank Beamer didn't spend a lot of time in the postgame press conference talking about the impact of Thomas' injury. He instead expressed disappointment at his team's overall performance in the game.

"We're going to look at the video and learn from this," he said. "This isn't one of those [videos] where we're going to say, 'Hey, we're not going to look at it.' I'm going to look at it and talk about communication on defense and execution on offense and what needs to happen to play better in a big ball game to finish the year."

Tech's recent struggles in bowl games make for a future column topic, one to come after further reflection by the coaching staff. The performance left a sour taste in everyone's mouths, but should not diminish what turned out to be a solid season.

Message board posters may scream at that, but the truth is most people pegged Tech at around eight wins before the season, expecting wins over

Duke, BC and Maryland and losses to Miami and North Carolina or Georgia Tech. And the Hokies could have easily won the Duke, BC and Maryland games.

But Tech's youth, particularly on offense, wasn't going to allow for a run at an ACC title. For starters, the Hokies played 11 true freshmen overall this past season, and three of those started on offense – offensive tackle Jonathan McLaughlin, tight end Calvin Cline and fullback Sam Rogers.

Fifteen players on the offense's depth chart were sophomores or younger. Nine played significant amounts, and two others – Jerome Wright and Carlis Parker – played key roles in the Sun Bowl.

Getting young kids experience bodes well for future years, but this season, the Hokies struggled, finishing 101st nationally in total offense. Among ACC teams, only Wake Forest averaged fewer than Tech's 356 yards per game.

Also, injuries played a role. Yes, Trey Edmunds breaking his leg against Virginia hurt the Hokies in the bowl game, and then Thomas, of course, going out with concussion-like symptoms left Tech without its best offensive weapon. But Ryan Malleck's preseason shoulder injury may have been the costliest of the season.

Malleck, a tight end, gave the Hokies experience and talent. It's not a secret that coordinator Scot Loeffler likes to use tight ends because they create matchup advantages. So losing Malleck really hurt, but getting him back, and with the experience Cline gained this season, that all

really creates some excitement for the future.

Injuries also afflicted the defense. Whip linebacker Ronny Vandyke's shoulder injury limited the staff. Cornerback Antone Exum's knee caused him to miss the first six games and his ankle caused him to miss the final three. Kyle Fuller missed basically the final five games of the season with a core injury. Tech missed his ability to tackle in the open field, particularly in the losses to Maryland and UCLA.

Finally – and few people talk about this – it takes time for a unit to become cohesive when new coaches come aboard. The last time Beamer changed offensive coordinators came after the 2001 season – a span of 11 seasons. This season, the new coaches found out the strengths and weaknesses of players and whether, or how, they fit into the scheme.

Tech's players on offense feel more optimistic going forward, knowing that the transition period is over.

"Last spring, you couldn't really call it a spring because it was so basic," receiver Willie Byrn said. "This spring, we're going to be able to implement some new stuff and find out who else can contribute to this offense. Another six months in this offense and with the coaches and getting comfortable with our quarterback is going to make a world of difference."

Tech fans are understandably in a surly mood because of the bowl outcome. But the bigger picture is this – a young team in an injury-filled season with new coaches on offense finished 8-5.

For sure, that ain't bad.

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croger roth report | by Bill Roth



Year of transition ends on sour note, but staff continues building for long-term success



Mark Leal had a rough go of it in the Sun Bowl in place of an injured Logan Thomas, but he's the leader for the starting job at quarterback heading into spring practice.

Well crew, another season is over, and this one didn't end exactly how we had hoped, did it?

You know, the past few months have represented a true transition period at Virginia Tech, both institutionally, where school officials have hired a new university president, and athletically, where the Hokies are in the final stages of hiring a new director of athletics to replace Jim Weaver. On the football field, this past season was one of transition as well, with a new offensive coordinator, new system, and an entirely new blocking scheme.

When there's change, the hope is for immediate results, and in some ways, we saw that on the football field. But in reality, the changes are more likely to pay off in the long run, and as a result, this football season turned out to be more of a "hold serve" type of campaign.

The Hokies had their moments – at East Carolina, at Miami, at Georgia Tech and in Charlottesville. In many ways, the team did better than some of its coaches thought it would back in August. But after starting 6-1, injuries and inconsistent play led to an 8-5 finish. More injuries, in-game injuries at the worst possible positions for Tech, led to a 42-12 rout by UCLA in the bowl game and that clearly leaves a bitter taste for players, coaches and fans alike (more on the bowl game and what it means – if anything – later).

First, a look back at the 2013 season, what it meant and what we can learn going forward.

TALENT WAS AN ISSUE: Obviously, the Hokies have many talented football players, some of whom will play in the NFL. However, they don't have as many as they've had in the past, or as many as some of the teams they're playing. The results speak for themselves.

Over the past two years, Tech has not had a game-breaking, home run-hitting tailback. There is no Lee Suggs, Kevin Jones, Darren Evans, Ryan Williams or David Wilson on this roster. As a freshman in 2008, Evans rushed for 1,265 yards and 11 touchdowns. In 2009, Williams, also a freshman, rushed for 1,655 yards and 21 touchdowns.

But this year, the inability to run the football was even more acute. Tech finished 109th in the nation in rushing out of 123 teams. Those are staggering numbers for head coach Frank Beamer and Hokie fans who have watched a program built on a power and effective rushing attack. Beamer said the best way to solve this issue is through recruiting (the staff expects to bring in at least two highly regarded tailbacks and five offensive linemen in the 2014 recruiting class).

In watching the Ohio State-Clemson Orange Bowl game and the Oklahoma-Alabama Sugar Bowl, we saw receivers for all four of those teams make plays (that's why they are called "playmaking receivers," right?). Tech has serviceable receivers, but nobody has emerged as a true game breaker at that position.

There are very few Sammy Watkins' out there, but when you look around the ACC and see players like Jamison Crowder at Duke, Tyler Boyd of Pittsburgh, Kelvin Benjamin and Rashad Greene at Florida State or even Michael Campanaro from Wake Forest, you see guys who are true weapons on offense.

Perhaps Willie Byrn or Josh Stanford can evolve into that at Tech. But over the past two years, the Hokies haven't had much of a deep threat, receivers who battle in a crowd to make the catch in traffic, or break free for big yards-after-catch results.

When you look at the ACC now, with these 14

teams, to win the conference, you need NFL-type players at the skill spots. Otherwise, you're really fighting an uphill battle when you play against the teams that have them, right? In the past, Tech had players like that, and the coaches have been working hard to re-stock and raise the talent level.

WHAT'S THE QUARTERBACK SITUATION?:

Transition is the name of the game here, too. Like Tim Sands, the university's new president, and the Hokies' new AD (whoever it may be), Tech's new quarterback will be learning on the job in the fall of 2014. The Hokies lose all-time passing leader Logan Thomas, who was also the team's key rushing threat the past two seasons. It's a gigantic loss.

Mark Leal is clearly the frontrunner heading into spring ball since he's been in the program for four seasons and has some playing experience. Don't judge Leal's skills on what you saw in El Paso. He can be a very solid quarterback, like "in the Al Clark mold," as one Tech assistant told me, referring to Tech's signal caller in the late 1990s.

It's hard to envision a scenario – barring injury – in which Leal isn't the starting quarterback for the 2014 season opener against William & Mary. Spring ball will be very interesting, and much of the media attention you'll see will rightly be focused on this position. Without a solid stud at tailback, the Hokies are going to lean heavily on their 2014 quarterback, like they leaned on Thomas. We'll see who emerges for this vital role at the end of spring ball, but finding someone who can consistently run the ball is going to be job No.1 – again.

FOUR KICKERS IN ONE SEASON?: In some ways, I think this bothered Coach Beamer as much as anything in 2013, and he doesn't want

to go through it again next year. Cody Journell (10 of 16), Eric Kristensen (4 of 5), Michael Brantover (1 of 2), and Ethan Keyerserling (0 of 3) were a combined 15 for 26 on field goals this season. Eleven missed field goals in one season is the most ever for a Beamer-coached team and totally the opposite of the consistency of Tech kickers during past 25 seasons.

The entire Journell episode hurt Beamer as much personally as it did from a coaching standpoint. Before the season began, the coach felt he had a future NFL kicker. But that didn't materialize, and now he'll look ahead to 2014 hoping to regain some consistency from that vital position.

WHY TECH'S DEFENSE CAN BE VERY SOLID AGAIN IN 2014:

Even after the UCLA game, the Hokies finished 2013 with the nation's fourth-best defense (283.2 ypg). The Hokies get the Vandyke brothers back for 2014 and played two freshmen this season, Kendall Fuller and Brandon Facyson, who are true stars in the making. There will be some new names out there, but the heart of Tech's team will be its defense again next year.

It just needs to improve in other areas. But the operation with Bud Foster, Charley Wiles, Cornell Brown and Torrian Gray is simply beautiful to watch. They lost a bunch of key seniors off this team, and expecting a top-10 ranking next year probably isn't realistic. They'll be solid and gunning for a big 2015.

CAN THE HOKIES WIN THE ACC NEXT YEAR?:

That's the goal, but it might be too much to ask with a first-year quarterback, and one who is going to be surrounded by some inexperience. The defense has a lot of holes to fill, too, but might be able to recover quickly and mold into another

sensational unit by the end of the season.

The bigger element here is the opposition. ACC teams are getting better. Next fall, Tech plays at Duke, at North Carolina, at Wake Forest and at Pittsburgh. In Blacksburg, the Hokies will battle Georgia Tech, Miami, BC and Virginia. So by missing both Florida State and Clemson (again), the Hokies have a bit of an advantage and should be in the thick of the race for the Coastal Division crown.

A new AD, and a new quarterback, will add a fresh flavor to much of what happens in Blacksburg. It's a transitional period here, and one that will affect Hokies from Burruss Hall, to the Jamerson Athletics Center, to the football meeting rooms. It should be fun to watch how it all develops, starting in the next month or so.

FINAL THOUGHTS:

In some ways, the Hokies got everything they could've hoped for out of this 2013 team. Tech needed to stay healthy in 2013, and injury-wise, Antone Exum never really returned, and Kyle Fuller missed half the season. The loss of Ryan Malleck was huge for the offense. Once Thomas, Edmunds and Calvin Cline were knocked out of the bowl game, the team was a shell of itself.

This team played so hard and had great chemistry. But it missed too many kicks, blew too many red-zone chances and was far too inconsistent for its coaches' liking.

The staff is looking hard at the talent level and determining if players are in the right spots, and those evaluations will continue through signing day and into spring ball. From up close, it looks like the Hokies are ready to make a burst with their overall talent and will be a really talented team again. They can be a nice team next fall. But the true finished product might not be seen until 2015 or 2016.



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Keeping up with Compliance

The compliance corner answers questions concerning the governance of intercollegiate athletics and its impact on our athletics department. Have a question? Please send it to inside@hokiesports.com and we'll answer it in upcoming issues. Now, here are a couple of questions that we've received from Tech alums and fans over the past few months, with responses from Tim Parker, Associate AD for Compliance & Governance:

Q: How big is the NCAA rulebook? Thanks, Jim in Blacksburg.

TP: "All of the NCAA Constitution and Bylaws are available online at any time. Athletics departments also receive printed copies. A couple years ago, several bylaws were consolidated and duplicative language was removed. Also, a decision was made not to include the NCAA bylaws dealing strictly with governance protocol (committee composition, etc.) in the printed manuals that are received annually by athletics departments. Because of these changes, the manual actually slimmed down by nearly 100 pages.

"Currently, the NCAA Division I Manual is comprised of 302 pages, including table of contents and index. That may seem like a lot to some people, but keep in mind that certain parts of the manual are only applicable to certain groups. Some bylaws are only relevant to athletics directors, some to presidents and faculty athletics representatives, some only to a single sport. Coaches need to be well versed in about 75 of the manual's pages (slightly more for football and basketball coaches), and knowledgeable of about 100 more."

Q: Can you explain how it took the NCAA a few weeks to rule on the Johnny Manziel case [Texas A&M's quarterback] and yet North Carolina basketball players P.J. Hairston and Leslie McDonald have missed nine games now? Manziel only missed a half of a game. I think this is what frustrates people with the NCAA. Thanks, B.J. in Christiansburg.

TP: "You ask a fair question, but you're not really making an apples-to-apples comparison. Each case gets judged by the NCAA on its own merit, and we don't know all the details, nor do we know who is cooperating.

"In the Manziel case, he was allegedly getting paid for autographing items that were later sold. The NCAA couldn't prove Manziel was paid, but it could prove he knew his autographs would be sold. Hence, he was suspended for half of the season opener.

"Hairston is being investigated for his connection with a rogue agent. McDonald reportedly appeared in a website advertisement for a designer mouth guard. Both of those cases put their amateur status in doubt. The NCAA needs to investigate the facts to determine a ruling.

"There could also be a backlog issue. The NCAA prioritizes cases based on the athlete's need to get back into competition. So it will handle football- and fall sports-related cases in the summer and then attempt to work on winter-sports cases by August and September. It's possible an accumulation of cases pushed the NCAA's investigation back."

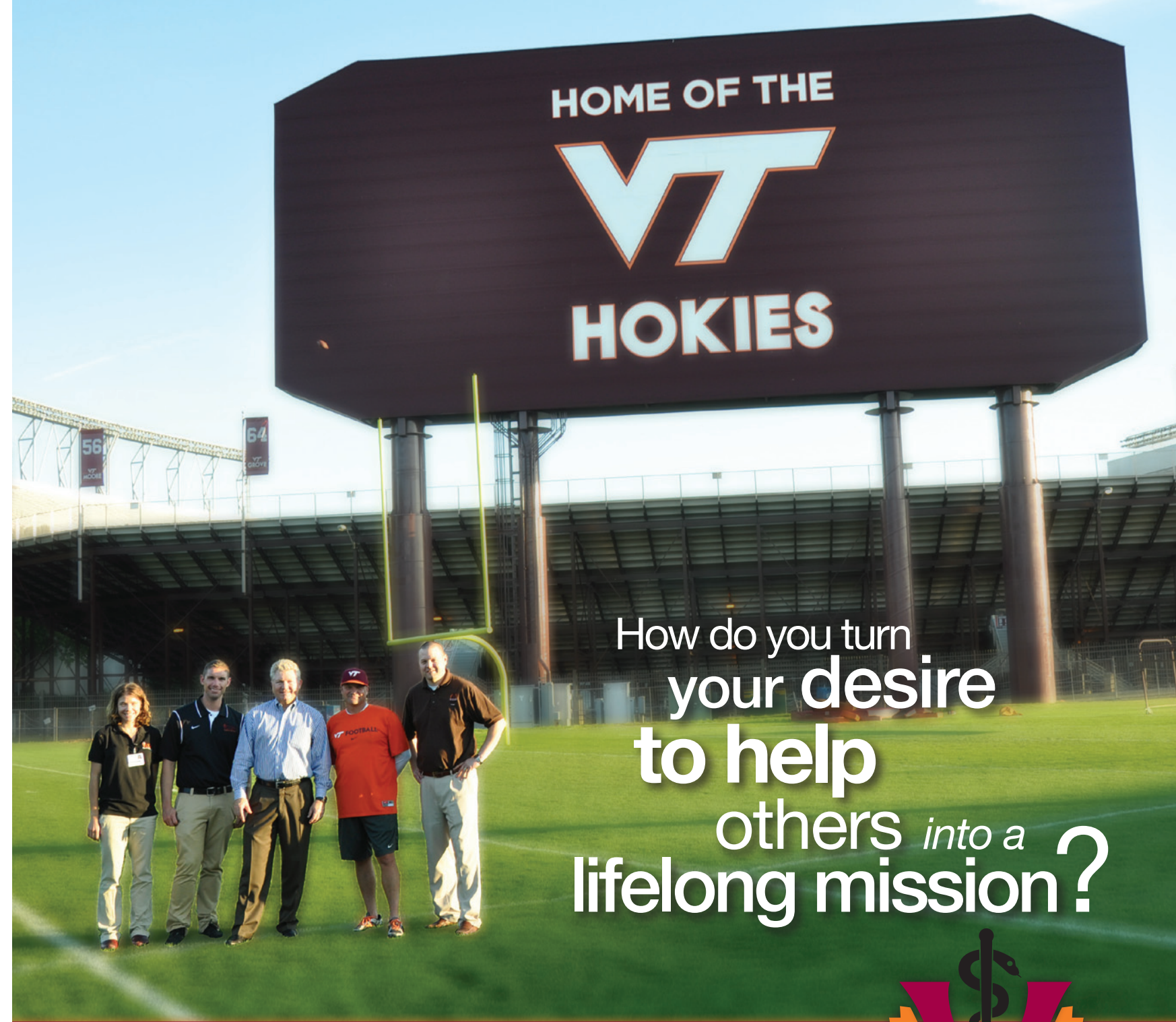
(Note: McDonald was reinstated after missing the nine games. The NCAA ruled that he must pay \$1,783 in restitution to a charity of his choice. North Carolina decided not to apply for reinstatement for Hairston, which leads one to believe the evidence was so overwhelming against Hairston that he had no chance of being reinstated.)

Q: I recently heard where there is a proposal on the table to allow schools to provide unlimited food for student-athletes. I was wondering where that stood. Thanks, Grant in Blacksburg.

TP: "There are two proposals that would loosen the reins on how institutions can feed student-athletes and both will be discussed at the NCAA convention this month. The one sure to draw the most opposition states, 'that an institution may provide meals to student-athletes incidental to practice activities during the playing season and while a student-athlete is representing the institution in noncompetitive events (e.g., student-athlete advisory committee meeting, media appearances); further, to specify that an institution may provide snacks to student-athletes at any time.'

"A lot of institutions like this idea. For starters, it insures that student-athletes get the calories they need with food better tailored for performance. Many schools, including Virginia Tech, already have nutritionists who handle meals and snacks under the current NCAA rules.

"Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, if you provide enough snacks and all-you-can-eat meals, then student-athletes living off campus can save some of their room and board stipend for other expenses. This might be a way to appease those opposed to the \$2,000 per year stipend proposal that continues to face widespread opposition." **VT**



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Playing in his last collegiate game, Jack Tyler was credited with 7 tackles, including a half of a sack.

SUN BOWL NOT BRIGHT FOR HOKIES

A second-quarter injury sent Logan Thomas to the sidelines, and the Hokies' defense couldn't contain a strong UCLA offense, as Tech ended the season with a 42-12 defeat

by Jimmy Robertson

The Virginia Tech football program traveled to the West Texas city of El Paso to play a bowl game and hoped for its day in the sun.

But a hit on Logan Thomas certainly darkened Tech's chances of winning.

A wicked hit in the second quarter forced Tech's quarterback and team leader to the sideline with concussion-like symptoms for the rest of the game, and the Hokies struggled from then on, falling 42-12 to the 17th-ranked UCLA Bruins in the Sun Bowl played at Sun Bowl Stadium in El Paso, Texas on New Year's Eve.

The loss marked a disappointing end to a season that began with such promise. Tech played then-No. 1 and defending national champion Alabama respectably in the season opener and then won six straight games to move to 6-1 and to a No. 16 ranking in The Associated Press poll. But the Hokies lost four of their final six games and finished the season with an 8-5 record.

Tech also lost its bowl game for the third time in four seasons. UCLA closed its season with a 10-3 mark.

"I'm disappointed we didn't function better as an organization," said Tech coach Frank Beamer, who fell to 9-12 in bowl games. "Give UCLA credit. They made more plays by far than we did, and that's the name of the game. When we got down, we turned the ball over, and things got out of hand. It's just disappointing to end the year this way.

"We're going to look at the video, though, and learn from this. This isn't one of those where we're going to say, 'Hey, we're not going to look at it.' I'm going to look at it and talk about communication on defense and execution on offense and what needs to happen to play better in a big ball game to finish the year."

Though Tech was struggling on defense, it only trailed UCLA 14-7 early in the second quarter

before the Bruins landed the big blow.

On a third-down play from the Tech 42 with 12:13 left in the first half, Thomas – who made his 40th consecutive start – scrambled to his left and completed a 3-yard pass to receiver Josh Stanford. But as he threw, he took a vicious hit to the head from UCLA linebacker Jordan Zumwalt, who received a personal foul penalty on the play.

Thomas stayed on the turf for several minutes before being escorted off the field by Tech's sports medicine staff. He did not return, though after the first series of the third quarter, he put on his helmet as if he was going to re-enter the game.

"I came in at halftime, and they [the sports medicine staff] gave me the [concussion] tests to see, and everything seemed fine," Thomas said. "But I guess they made the decision after that first series in the second half.

"That [sitting out] was the worst thing I've ever gone through. I'd rather hear you guys [media

members] talk bad about me all day long than to have to watch a game from the sideline."

Thomas' injury forced the staff to go with backup quarterback Mark Leal, who was playing in just his third game of the season. The lack of experience showed, too, as Leal threw two second-half interceptions – both of which led to UCLA touchdowns.

Tech trailed 14-7 at the time of Thomas' departure, but managed to cut into the lead in the third quarter, thanks to a muffed punt by UCLA punt returner Shaquell Adams. Long snapper Eddie D'Antuono recovered at the UCLA 12 for Tech, and the Hokies drove to the UCLA 5 before a third-down pass from Leal to D.J. Coles fell incomplete. Michael Branthover made his first collegiate field goal, a 22-yarder with 3:53 left in the third that cut the lead to 14-10.

"That was huge," Tech tailback J.C. Coleman said of not scoring a touchdown there. "That would have swung the momentum a little bit. Our defense would have gained momentum as well. Maybe they would have gotten a stop and we could have gone up 21-14. But it didn't happen that way, and that was very unfortunate."

"I wanted to go for it [on fourth down] and get it tied up, but it was just a little bit long [3 yards]," Beamer said. "Let's take the points, and we got the points, but they went right back down the field on us."

The Bruins responded following the Hokies' score with an 85-yard march. The big play came on third-and-10 from the UCLA 25 when quarterback Brett Hundley threw a short pass to receiver Devin Lucien. Tech's Kyshoen Jarrett missed the tackle, and Lucien went 32 yards to the Tech 43. Seven plays later, Paul Perkins scored on a 5-yard run that gave UCLA a 21-10 lead with 14:20 left in the game.

The Bruins then put the game away less than a minute later. In the process of being sacked, Leal flipped the ball in the air while attempting to get rid of it and avoid the sack. But UCLA linebacker Myles Jack intercepted it and returned it 24 yards for a touchdown with 13:22 left that essentially iced the game.

The Bruins tacked on two more touchdowns in what turned out to be a 28-point fourth quarter for them. Another Leal interception – this one by Zumwalt – led to an 8-yard touchdown pass from Hundley to Thomas Duarte with 7:31 left. The icing on the cake came less than two minutes later when Hundley threw a 59-yard touchdown strike to Shaquell Evans.

Hundley played masterfully throughout on his way to sharing co-MVP honors with Zumwalt, who had 10 tackles and the interception. UCLA's signal caller ran for 161 yards on 10 carries and

scored two touchdowns, and he also threw for 226 yards and two scores.

Hundley had 168 yards rushing on six carries in the first half against a Tech defense that went into the game ranked eighth nationally against the run. He scored on a 7-yard run less than two minutes into the game, and in the second quarter, he gave UCLA the lead for good on an 86-yard touchdown burst.

The 86-yard run by Hundley was the longest run from scrimmage against the Hokies in a bowl game.

"We just couldn't corral him," Beamer said of Hundley. "He broke out of there a couple of times. He's a good runner. We did a good job against him in the second half, but he hurt us with the long touchdown. Communication hurt us. Part of us was in one defense and part of us was in another. That usually doesn't happen to us. It's disappointing."

"We were just playing sloppy," Tech linebacker Jack Tyler said. "We did things we hadn't done all year. Like Coach said, it was a lack of communication. It was breakdowns that we didn't do all year. We were just sloppy.

"It's very frustrating to go out like this, especially being the leader of the defense. I would have liked for us to play a little better and communicate better and not be so sloppy. I put a lot of that on my shoulders. So I'm disappointed."


The Hokies allowed a season-high 197 yards rushing. UCLA finished with 447 yards of offense.

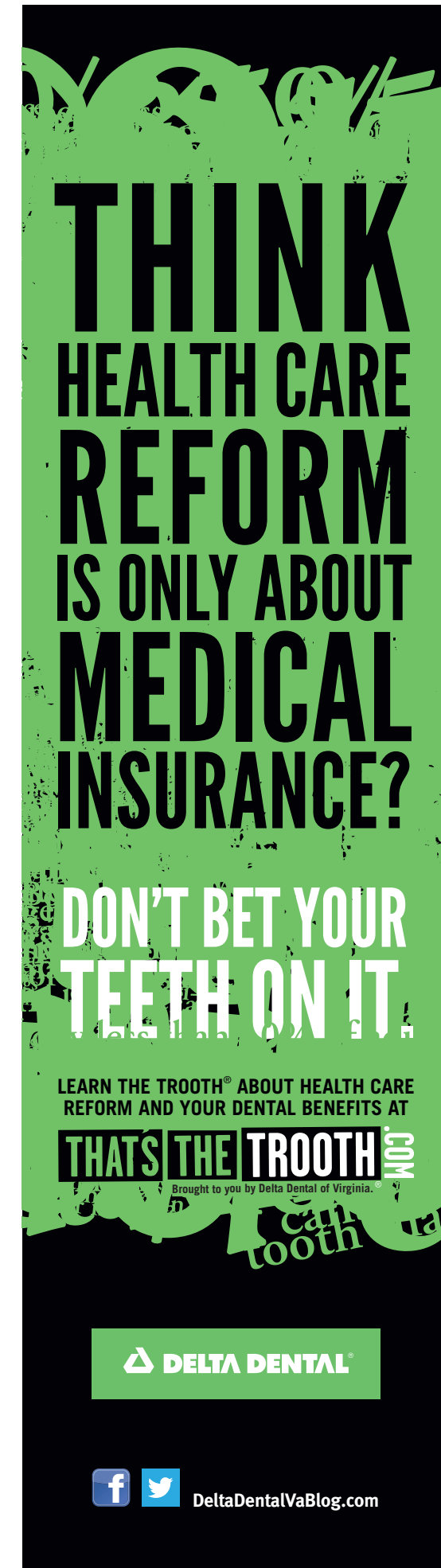
Tech's best drive of the game came in the first quarter. The Hokies drove into UCLA territory and then came up with a big play when Thomas found tight end Calvin Cline for a 37-yard gain to the UCLA 1. On the next play, Coleman scored, and Branthover's extra point tied the game at 7 with 8:14 left in the first quarter.

The Hokies ended up scoring just one touchdown in each of their final two games this season. Leal completed 12 of 25 for 130 yards and two interceptions to pace a Tech offense that had 319 yards.

"I'm disappointed that Mark didn't play better," Beamer said. "I've got a lot of confidence in him. I think it's a lesson that you need to be ready to play each and every week. He did a couple of things really nice and really good, and then he had a couple of throws that weren't so good.

"Mark's going to be okay. Losing Logan and losing our tight end [Cline injured a knee in the second half], that's tough, but I expect those guys behind them to step in there behind them and perform, and that's disappointing."

In his final collegiate game, Thomas led the Hokies in rushing with 49 yards on three carries. He completed 3 of 11 for 46 yards. 



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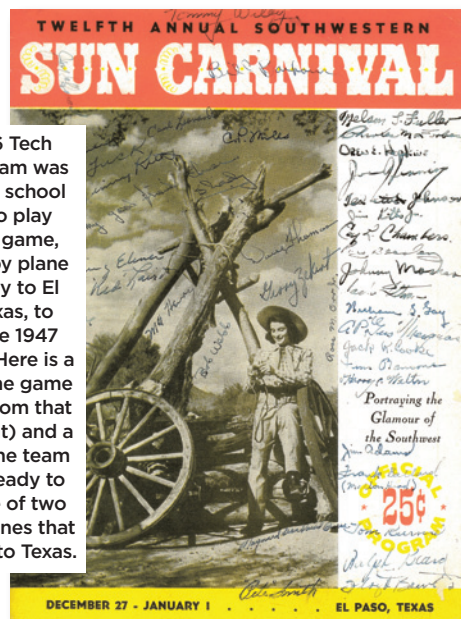
FORMER TECH PLAYERS REMEMBER FONDLY FIRST TRIP TO EL PASO

Most members of the 1946 squad have passed away, but the few who remain take pride in being the school's first bowl team and remember well the program's original trip to the Sun Bowl

by Jimmy Robertson



The 1946 Tech football team was the first in school history to play in a bowl game, traveling by plane all the way to El Paso, Texas, to play in the 1947 Sun Bowl. Here is a photo of the game program from that game (right) and a photo of the team as it got ready to board one of two DC-3 airplanes that took them to Texas.



Ray Beasley is 90 years old and lives with his wife in Midlothian, Va. He and his wife have been married 72 years.

He still plays golf, and in late November, shot a round of 88. He takes pride, deservedly so, in shooting his age, or a little better, and chuckles when informed that a lot of people shoot his age.

But the impressive thing about Ray Beasley isn't related to numbers. Ask this 90-year-old young man about Virginia Tech's 1947 appearance in the Sun Bowl, and he can practically recite the team's daily itinerary and the details of the game 67 years later.

Beasley is one of what is believed to be five former Tech players still living who played in the 1947 Sun Bowl against Cincinnati – the school's first bowl game and the first bowl game for any team out of the Commonwealth of Virginia. It is believed that 11 members of the 1946 team still are living, but not everyone traveled to the bowl game back then. Ross Orr, Gerhard Zekert, Floyd Bowles and Paul Zender are the other four who are living and played in the game.

The announcement that the 2013 Hokies were

returning to the Sun Bowl to play UCLA brought forth smiles among this crew – and brought back a lot of good memories.

"I was pleased," said Orr, an honorable mention All-American at tackle and kicker in 1945 who now lives in Bethlehem, Pa. "I think the Sun Bowl stands head and shoulders above 90 percent of the other bowls because of the background. I think there are a few bowls that are really nice. Most bowls are just football games that someone throws a lot of money into the game and you go and play a game and go home. Then there are others with a lot of tradition.

"At least with some of these bowls, the community is really into it. It's good for them, and they spend a year working on it. That's the case with the Sun Bowl. I think it's great, so I was happy when they [Virginia Tech] were going back to the Sun Bowl. It didn't matter who the opponent was to me."

The 1946 team certainly enjoyed its trip. But that team was more than just a bowl team. In a way, that team symbolized the quick rebirth of Tech football following World War II.

The university shut down its athletics department after scores of cadets in the Corps of Cadets, which served as the foundation of the school in those days, went off to fight. Tech did not field a football team in 1943 or 1944, as many of the football players served as cadets and participated in the war efforts. So, too, did head coach Jimmy Kitts, who joined the Navy and served after the 1941 season.

In 1945, the university resumed athletics, and the 1945 team, under Henry B. Redd, went 2-6. Kitts later returned from the war and assumed his role as the coach, guiding the 1946 team.

"That's when all the veterans came back," said Beasley, who served but was never in combat. "It was difficult for the coaches because, in 1945, they had brought in some great freshmen. Then in 1946, all the veterans were taking the place of the freshmen, and it was difficult for the coaches handling that situation. We had a lot of guys transferring in who had gone to other schools, too. It was an interesting time. All schools had the same situation."

The 1946 season did not get off to a great start,



with the team tying Charlie "Choo Choo" Justice and the North Carolina Tar Heels and rival Virginia in the first two games and then losing the next two (William & Mary and Maryland). But the Gobblers, as they were known in those days, rallied to win three of their final five games to finish 3-3-3.

That might have made for a rather forgettable season if not for one thing – the invitation to play in the Sun Bowl in El Paso on New Year's Day. The Gobblers would take on Cincinnati, which sported an 8-2 record heading into the game.

Tech got the bid because of an alum who worked for a power company in El Paso. The alum – Marion Adams, Class of 1941 – also served on the Sun Bowl committee. Two other teams, Hardin Simmons and Texas Tech, declined bids, so Adams pitched Tech's name to the committee, and the Gobblers ultimately received the bid.

The team, of course, wanted to play in the game, and the athletics department was all for it, seeing a way to add nearly \$10,000 to the coffers – the payout for each team.

Only 32 players and a handful of coaches went to the game. They loaded up on two DC-3 planes and flew from Roanoke to Knoxville, Tenn., Knoxville to Memphis, Tenn., Memphis to Fort Worth, Texas, and Fort Worth to Big Spring, Texas. They bused from Big Spring to El Paso because of storms.

"That was the first time I had been in a plane, so that was exciting for me at that age, just going to fly all the way to El Paso," said Zekert, who now lives in Suffolk, Va. "I think everyone felt the same way.

"What greeted us in El Paso was more snow. It had snowed here [in Blacksburg], and they scraped the Drillfield off so we could practice. When we got to El Paso, they had said, 'We don't have snow,' but there was snow. It wasn't that much, but it was there. It was cold, too."

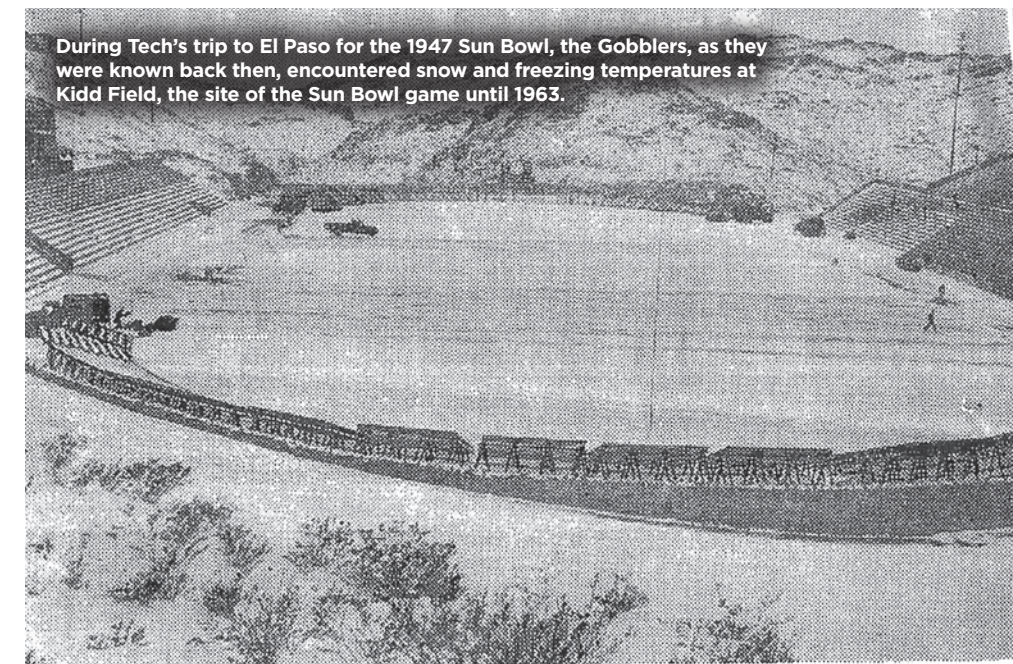
In spite of the weather, the week turned out to be a fabulous one for the players and the coaches. They stayed at the Hotel Cortez, the nicest establishment in El Paso. They got to make a foray into Mexico, journeying across the border to Juarez, where

they saw a live Mexican bullfight conducted by Manolete, a renowned bullfighter. The team went to two Texas ranch breakfast parties, went on tours of the city, attended luncheons and received gifts, including watches with the words "The Sun Bowl '47" engraved on them.

The game didn't turn out to be as nice for the Hokies. Playing in cold, snowy and icy conditions at Kidd Field, adjacent to the current Sun Bowl Stadium, the Gobblers gave up 12 points in the third quarter and lost 18-6. Tech blocked the three

Beasley said. "They didn't have lights on the field. It was an old field, not the one they play on now. It was a dark day, and it was raining, snowing, sleeting and everything. I don't think it got up to about 25 [degrees], but it was worse than that. I don't think anyone could make an extra point.

"I know Cincinnati was a rough, tough, rugged team. I got beat up pretty bad. On two occasions, their players, rather than try to tackle me, gave me good right-hand punches to the face. We didn't have facemasks like they do today. I ended up with



During Tech's trip to El Paso for the 1947 Sun Bowl, the Gobblers, as they were known back then, encountered snow and freezing temperatures at Kidd Field, the site of the Sun Bowl game until 1963.

El Paso's Sun Bowl, covered in snow. Here is where the Gobblers played the University of Cincinnati Bearcats to a first half standstill, only to lose in the final half, 18-6 in the 12th annual game played on New Year's Day.

extra points and John Maskas blocked his seventh punt of the season. But the Gobblers' only score came on a 3-yard run by Ralph Beard in the fourth quarter. Two interceptions by Harold Johnson and Cincy's 369 yards rushing were too much to overcome.

"We woke up [the day of the game] and the whole state of Texas was iced in, nothing but ice,"

a broken nose and swollen lips. But they beat us."

The Gobblers tried to return home the next day, but the weather got so bad that it forced them to stay in El Paso an extra day. That started a three-day saga, which included spending a night in Dallas and a night in Knoxville.

"It was quite an experience," Beasley said. Tech finished with a 3-4-3 record in 1946, but

where are they now? | 1947 sun bowl members

this group of players was anything but losers. Most served their country with honor and valor, and then came back and, like the others, served their university with character and dignity. Of the 46 members of that 1946 team, 45 graduated from Tech – information could not be found to verify the other one's status.

Many also enjoyed success after their playing days ended. Beasley contemplated going to Florida and coaching football at a high school near Tampa, but with a wife and child when he graduated in 1948 with a degree in business administration, he decided to take a more stable position at Bell Telephone in Richmond, where he worked for 36 years before retiring.

Zekert graduated in 1949 with a degree in chemical engineering and took a job at Planter's Peanuts in Suffolk, Va., working in all phases of peanut processing. He worked there for 40 years.

The 86-year-old Orr, who graduated with a degree in biology, went on to medical school at the Medical College of Virginia and later did an internship at Ohio State's university hospital. He then did a residency at St. Luke's University Hospital in Bethlehem, Pa. He became a surgeon and later developed the vascular program and the clinical vascular laboratory (which bears his name) at St. Luke's.

There were other success stories. Winchester, Va., natives Bob and Frank Taylor worked for the

FBI and CIA, respectively. Charlie Forbes, from Newport News, Va., worked for DuPont as an engineer for a while, but later came back to Tech and worked for President Bill Lavery as the first Vice President for Development and University Relations. He spent 14 years at Tech before leaving to become the vice president of the University of Delaware, where he stayed until retiring. He passed away in 2012.

Oren Hopkins, a Norfolk, Va., native, worked for DuPont, Sharples Corp., and Envirotech, Inc., as an engineer before later founding his own company. He passed away in 2011. John Kroehling, a Springfield, N.J., native, has retired twice, but formed his own company (J.H. Kroehling Associates) in 1991 and still works today. In fact, Kroehling, an engineering graduate, gave \$500,000 to the university to build the Kroehling Advanced Materials Foundry near campus, a building used for high-tech metal casting.

In the spring of 2009, 11 members of the 1946 team, including all those mentioned above, returned to Blacksburg for a two-day reunion – an event spearheaded by Orr and his wife, Sandy. The Orr's diligent research resulted in newspaper articles, photos and other general information about the team, all of which greatly helped the Tech athletics department learn more about that era (the department's records only go back to 1950).


Already, the department has used some of the photos in exhibits commemorating the first bowl team at the Tech Hall of Fame over at Lane Stadium. Plans call for using others in Legends Hall, a football memorabilia area in the Merryman Center. This will bring attention to their deserving accomplishments.

"A couple of friends know, and they're like, 'You ought to be proud of that to have your team go back to the Sun Bowl and you played on the first Sun Bowl team. You ought to be proud of that.'" Zekert said. "I said, 'Well, I am.' What can you do but to be proud of that? That's part of your memoirs."

The 2009 reunion probably marked the last huddle for this collection of greats. As the clock of life runs, they are in a hurry-up offense.

But as they watched the Hokies play UCLA on New Year's Eve, they did so with a sense of pride. Sixty-seven years ago, they were there, cementing themselves in Virginia Tech history. Back then, they were pleased.

Now, they're proud. "When most people talk about Virginia Tech football, they think it began in the 1950s," Orr said. "They lost some records, and the people who write the books, they sort of begin in the 1950s."

"But there were some great people before that. I think now we're more proud of what we did than we were during all those years." 



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The Hokies will miss the leadership of D.J. Coles, who mentored a young receiving corps this past season and led the team with six touchdown receptions.

SAME OLD COLES

The oldest player on Tech's team didn't quite have the senior season he wanted, but D.J. Coles handled the situation with a maturity expected from one his age

by Jimmy Robertson

D.J. Coles turned 24 years old in September, and by nearly every standard, he is a young man.

But in the college football world, teammates can be relentless with their teasing, and at Virginia Tech this past season, Coles simply wasn't a young man, at least not to his teammates.

According to them, he wasn't really an elder statesman either. They deemed that way too sophisticated of a title for him. Instead, they viewed him as a senior citizen, someone with an AARP card and worthy of getting discounts at local restaurants and shops.

"Oh, man, I've heard it all," Coles said, laughing, in an interview a couple of weeks before the Hokies' Sun Bowl game against UCLA. "People call me 'Grandpa.' They say I've been here eight or nine years. They say I played with Bruce Smith [a former Tech defensive great from the early 1980s]. I've heard all the jokes."

Coles was, indeed, the oldest player on Tech's 2013 roster, and while younger football players tend to be a little faster and stronger than their older counterparts even in their early 20s, they tend to lack the experience and wisdom of older players. It was that wisdom and maturity that helped Coles survive a bumpy season, and for the most part, a bumpy career as a Hokie.

Coles wrapped up his career by catching two passes for 22 yards in the Hokies' 42-12 loss to the Bruins. He caught 25 passes for 387 yards and six touchdowns for the season.

The season wasn't what he expected, being the receiving group's lone senior.

"It wasn't up to my expectations," he admitted.

Tech's coaching staff reduced Coles' role this season after he struggled somewhat in the season opener against Alabama. He dropped a few passes, as did some of Tech's other receivers. But the coaches saw a lack of burst in Coles – something they attributed to a knee injury Coles suffered at the end of the 2011 season – and that concerned them.

Coles, who had suffered a torn PCL and

underwent surgery in early 2012, tried to play in last year's season opener against Georgia Tech. But early in the game, he re-injured the knee. The injury didn't require surgery, but it forced Coles to take a redshirt year – something he did not do as a freshman.

This year's Alabama game marked his first game in more than 18 months. Coles attributed his struggles in that game to rust more than a

“Oh, man, I've heard it all. People call me 'Grandpa.' They say I've been here eight or nine years. They say I played with Bruce Smith [a former Tech defensive great from the early 1980s]. I've heard all the jokes.”

– D.J. Coles on his age

sore knee.

"I wouldn't blame it on the knee," he said. "It wasn't the knee. I hadn't played in more than a year. I came back a couple of months early [in 2012] and re-injured the knee. I didn't have to have surgery, but I was overweight. I had to get back into playing shape. I hadn't played in a year."

Coles eventually worked himself back into shape and back into the lineup. He played sparingly in Tech's win over Western Carolina, but caught a 19-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Logan Thomas in the game.

He returned to the starting lineup against East Carolina in the third game of the season, but again, played sparingly. He caught three passes, including a 3-yarder for a touchdown.

At that point, Tech's staff started envisioning more of a pointed role for Coles. Offensive coordinator Scot Loeffler decided to use the 6-foot-4, 235-pound Coles in the red zone, or inside the opposing team's 20-yard line, more. The move made sense, too, because Coles was the Hokies' only receiver with any size.

He caught a touchdown in the Hokies' win over Georgia Tech, two touchdowns in Tech's win over North Carolina, and a touchdown in the

Hokies' loss to Maryland on senior day, which marked Coles' last appearance at Lane Stadium.

He led the team with six touchdown receptions – and all but one of them came when the Hokies reached the red zone.

"That's what I became after the first game," Coles said of his role as the red-zone receiver. "I embraced it. Any role I could get to help the team, yeah, I'm fine with it. When we get in the red zone, my number is called a lot. I embraced it, and I took it – and I liked it."

Tech's staff credited Coles for handling the situation maturely. In many instances, seniors become disgruntled when losing playing time to younger players, and those same seniors can become cancerous to team chemistry.

Not Coles. He became good friends with those younger guys – even though he was as much as six years older than some of them. In fact, he is six years older than freshman Deon Newsome, who turns 19 in February, and he was six years older than freshman David Prince until Prince turned 19 in November.

"I put my pride behind me," he said. "I played for the guys out there on the field with me. The younger guys in the room look up to me. They were asking for advice. Just going out and being there for them and mentoring them, I didn't want them to go through the same thing. We had to win, and I couldn't just get down on myself. I would have been hurting us more than helping us."

"I told those guys to keep doing what they were doing and not to worry about me. Everything is going to work out for the team. Toward the end of the year, I got more playing time. But I needed to be there for them [at the beginning of the season], being the only senior in the room, and I needed to help them out throughout the season."

Coles probably will wonder "What if?" when looking back on his career. He enjoyed a sweet 2011 season as a third receiver behind starters Danny Coale and Jarrett Boykin, catching 36

passes for 480 yards and three touchdowns. He played a terrific game in the Hokies' loss to Clemson in the ACC championship game that season, hauling in seven passes for 116 yards and a touchdown – the lone 100-yard receiving game of his career.

That was the type of game Tech's staff expected from Coles when then-assistant coach Jim Cavanaugh recruited him out of Goochland High School near Richmond. He played tailback at Goochland and led them to the state championship his junior season, beating a Giles High School squad led by former Tech kicker Cody Journell (Coles ran for 118 yards and scored two touchdowns in the game). He also won the state title in the 100-meter dash at the Group A track and field meet in Radford, Va., as a sophomore. He possessed a lot of potential.

He displayed it in that 2011 season, but he tore his PCL in the Sugar Bowl loss to Michigan. That caused him to miss spring practice in 2012, and he probably came back too early, which resulted in the re-injury against Georgia Tech – and in the subsequent redshirt year.

"I was in a lot of pain," he said. "I couldn't run on it. I guess it was a sprained knee, with a bone bruise. I had never redshirted, so I felt like I needed to take that time off and let it heal and then come back the next year.

"It [the 2012 season] was hard to watch, going through the year we had, especially after all the 10-win teams we'd had. Finishing 7-6 and knowing that I couldn't help my team, that was tough."

Coles nearly didn't come back for this past season. After missing the 2012 campaign, he contemplated leaving school, going somewhere and getting himself in the best shape possible, and then preparing for the NFL Draft. Already



D.J. Coles played in 50 games in his career and finished with 64 catches for 894 yards and nine touchdowns.

23 then, he thought maybe it was time to move on to the next phase in life.

But he lacked one thing – his degree. He needed only a semester's worth of courses to wrap up a degree in human development.

"I thought about it," Coles said of leaving. "But I hadn't graduated, so I thought I'd come back and get my degree. It was in consideration, though. If I had graduated, I think I might have tried to get real healthy and then entered the draft last year. But it [coming back] was all because I hadn't graduated. That's why I came back."


Coles hopes to get his shot with an NFL team this spring. He feels the football gods owe him

one. Maybe they do.

But if that plan fails to work out, he may get into law enforcement.

"I want to have a job that's hands on, where you do something different every day," he said. "I want a job where you never know what you're going to get, and that's one job when you don't know what's going to happen."

He probably would be good working in law enforcement. He got that experience this season, policing a bunch of receivers much younger than him.

Then again, wasn't everyone younger than him? Just ask him. He'll tell you. His teammates didn't let him forget it. 

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Season-Ending Depth Chart

Here is a look at the depth chart for the entire season. The number before the slash indicates plays from scrimmage, while the number after the slash indicates plays on special teams. The number of plays came from the coaching staff.

Note: **This does not include the number of plays from the Sun Bowl, but does include final stats.**

by **Jimmy Robertson**

OFFENSE

QUARTERBACKS

- 3 Logan Thomas (6-6, 254, r-Sr.)** – 851/0. Started all 13 games during the regular season. Completed 227 of 402 (56.5 percent) for 2,907 yards, with 16 touchdowns and 13 interceptions. Finished second on the team in rushing with 344 yards and had four touchdowns.
- 6 Mark Leal (6-0, 217, r-Jr.)** – 16/5. Played in just three games this season, seeing most of his action in the Sun Bowl after Thomas was injured. Completed 15 of 29 for 155 yards, with two interceptions this season.
- 12 Trey Gresh (6-1, 209, Sr.)** – 0/58.

TAILBACKS

- 14 Trey Edmunds (6-1, 216, r-Fr.)** – 516/0. Started 10 games and played in 12. Led the Hokies in rushing with 675 yards before breaking his leg in the UVa game. Scored a team-best 10 rushing touchdowns. Also caught 17 passes for 155 yards and two touchdowns.
- 4 J.C. Coleman (5-7, 191, So.)** – 231/22. Played in 10 games, starting one, and ran for 284 yards on 84 carries and scored a touchdown. Caught 11 passes for 79 yards.
- 28 Chris Mangus (6-0, 184, r-Fr.)** – 102/32. Started two games and played in all 13. Ran for 141 yards on 26 carries and scored a touchdown on a 76-yard run against Western Carolina. Caught nine passes for 72 yards.
- 15 Joel Caleb (6-2, 205, r-Fr.)** – 39/30. Started one game and played in 11. Rushed for 41 yards on eight carries and scored a touchdown. Caught two passes for a yard.
- 39 Daniel Dyer (5-10, 204, r-Jr.)** – 0/56. Played in eight games.
- 20 Maurice Taylor (5-8, 172, r-So.)** – 0/45. Played in seven games.

FULLBACKS

- 45 Sam Rogers (5-10, 220, Fr.)** – 238/95. Started two games and played in all 13. Ran five times for 9 yards and caught 12 passes for 78 yards.
- 25 Jerome Wright (6-2, 221, Fr.)** – 14/59. Played in 12 games. Ran seven times for 27 yards and caught three passes for 23 yards.
- 47 Greg Gadell (5-10, 207, r-Jr.)** – 7/92.
- 37 Fuller Hoepner (6-2, 258, r-Jr.)** – 1/23.

SPLIT ENDS

- 5 Joshua Stanford (6-1, 196, r-Fr.)** – 657/1. Started 12 games and played in all 13. Caught 40 passes for 640 yards and a touchdown.
- 18 D.J. Coles (6-4, 234, r-Sr.)** – 288/2. Started eight games and played in all 13. Caught 25 passes for 387 yards and a team-leading six touchdowns.
- 16 Carlis Parker (6-3, 185, Fr.)** – 47/0. Played in 10 games, starting one. Rushed six times for 40 yards in the Sun Bowl.
- 85 E.L. Smiling (6-4, 211, r-Jr.)** – 15/0. Played in seven games.

FLANKERS

- 80 Demitri Knowles (6-1, 180, r-So.)** – 603/41. Started six games and played in all 13. Caught 45 passes for 641 yards and three touchdowns. Returned 22 kicks for a 21.8-yard average, with a long of 88 yards.
- 82 Willie Byrn (5-10, 186, r-Jr.)** – 465/28. Started seven games and played in all 13. Caught a team-leading 51 passes for 660 yards and two touchdowns. Returned 10 punts for 37 yards.
- 83 Charley Meyer (6-1, 215, r-Fr.)** – 78/39. Started three games and played in 11. Caught one pass for 5 yards.

LEFT TACKLES

- 71 Jonathan McLaughlin (6-5, 313, Fr.)** – 852/44. Started all 13 games.
- 69 Mark Shuman (6-7, 295, r-Jr.)** – 22/9. Played in five games.
- 62 Ross Ward (6-3, 303, r-So.)** – 13/0. Played in the Western Carolina game.

LEFT GUARDS

- 79 Caleb Farris (6-3, 308, Jr.)** – 853/4. Started all 13 games.
- 75 Alston Smith (6-2, 281, r-Fr.)** – 9/6/57. Played six snaps on defense against Western Carolina. Was moved to guard shortly thereafter and played nine snaps from scrimmage on offense. Played in all 13 games.

CENTERS

- 76 David Wang (6-2, 299, r-Jr.)** – 818/0. Started all 13 games. Graded at 82 percent and was second on the team with 59 knockdown blocks during the regular season.
- 64 Matt Arkema (6-3, 296, r-Jr.)** – 21/0. Played in four games.

- 51 Jack Willenbrock (6-2, 237, r-Fr.)** – 0/22. Played in six games.

RIGHT GUARDS

- 74 Andrew Miller (6-4, 296, r-Sr.)** – 802/0. Started all 13 games. Led Tech with 115 knockdown blocks in the regular season. Graded at 86 percent during the regular season.
- 72 Augie Conte (6-6, 302, r-Fr.)** – 13/15. Played in five games. All of his 13 reps on offense came against Western Carolina.
- 68 Marcus Mapp (6-4, 295, r-So.)** – 13/0. Played his 13 reps on offense against Western Carolina.

RIGHT TACKLES

- 63 Laurence Gibson (6-6, 290, r-Jr.)** – 376/53. Started six games and played in all 13.
- 55 Brent Benedict (6-5, 292, r-Jr.)** – 547/38. Started seven games and played in all 13.

TIGHT ENDS

- 93 Calvin Cline (6-4, 238, Fr.)** – 582/3. Started seven games and played in 12. Caught 26 passes for 321 yards and two touchdowns.
- 33 Darius Redman (6-4, 256, r-So.)** – 151/165. Started one game and played in all 13.
- 86 Zack McCray (6-4, 247, r-Jr.)** – 23/66. Played in 12 games.
- 81 Duan Perez-Means (6-4, 242, r-Jr.)** – 165/33. Played in the first four games before deciding to give up football.
- 49 Dakota Jackson (6-3, 267, r-Fr.)** – 2/0. Played in the Western Carolina game.

DEFENSE

STUD ENDS

- 99 James Gayle (6-4, 255, r-Sr.)** – 603/48. A third-team All-ACC choice by the coaches. Started every game. Finished with 44 tackles (20 solo), including 10.5 for a loss, and 6 sacks. Led the team with 33 hurries.
- 66 Tyrel Wilson (6-2, 230, r-Sr.)** – 140/70. Played in 12 games. Recorded 13 tackles (8 solo), including 1.5 for a loss, and a sack.
- 91 Matt Roth (6-3, 239, r-So.)** – 7/98. Played in seven games. Played on defense against Western Carolina and East Carolina. Had five assists.
- 87 Dewayne Alford (6-2, 240, r-Fr.)** – 8/16/105. Played in all 13 games. Played on defense against Western Carolina and North Carolina. Played eight snaps as a fullback in the North Carolina game when

Sam Rogers went down with an injury.

ENDS

- 42 J.R. Collins (6-2, 248, r-Sr.)** – 463/93. An honorable mention choice to the All-ACC team by the coaches. Started in 12 games and played in all 13. Registered 51 tackles (24 solo), including 11 for a loss, and 5 sacks. Was second on the team with 24 hurries. Also forced a fumble.
- 90 Dadi Nicolas (6-3, 224, r-So.)** – 1/288/56. Started one game and played in all 13. Tallied 32 tackles (22 solo), including 7 for a loss, and 4 sacks. Was in for one play on offense against Georgia Tech.
- 4 Ken Ekanem (6-3, 242, r-Fr.)** – 7/62. Played in 11 games. Saw six snaps on defense against Western Carolina and one against Duke. Had 3 tackles (1 solo).

NOSE TACKLES

- 98 Derrick Hopkins (6-0, 311, Sr.)** – 6/603/47. A second-team All-ACC choice by the media and the coaches. Started all 13 games. Had 54 tackles (21 solo), including 9 for a loss, and 5 sacks. Recovered a fumble and blocked a kick. Played six reps as a fullback in Tech's goal-line offense.
- 60 Woody Baron (6-1, 265, Fr.)** – 117/61. Played in all 13 games. Had 8 tackles (4 solo).

TACKLES

- 92 Luther Maddy (6-1, 296, Jr.)** – 609/8. A third-team All-ACC choice by the media and the coaches. Started all 13 games. Recorded 55 tackles (28 solo), including a team-leading 13.5 for a loss, and 6.5 sacks.
- 95 Nigel Williams (6-2, 283, r-Fr.)** – 128/61. Played in all 13 games. Had 14 tackles (7 solo), including 7 for a loss, and 2 sacks.
- 97 Kris Harley (6-0, 283, r-So.)** – 6/1. Played all of his snaps in the Western Carolina game.

MIKE LINEBACKERS

- 58 Jack Tyler (6-1, 230, r-Sr.)** – 748/79. A second-team All-ACC choice by the media and the coaches. Started all 13 games. Led the team in tackles with 100 (35 solo), including 11 for a loss, and 4.5 sacks. Also forced a fumble.
- 36 Chase Williams (6-2, 220, r-Jr.)** – 18/121. Played in 11 games and registered 12 tackles (3 solo). His action on defense came in the Alabama and Western Carolina games.
- 44 Devin Vandyke (6-0, 218, r-Fr.)** – 0/8. Played in one game, tearing his ACL against Western Carolina and missing the rest of the season.
- 53 Drew Burns (6-3, 218, r-Fr.)** – 0/27. Played in four games.

BACKERS

- 24 Tariq Edwards (6-2, 234, r-Sr.)** – 733/82. Started all 13 games. Tallied 74 tackles (38 solo), including 11 for a loss, and 3.5 sacks. Also had an interception and recovered a fumble.

- 35 Dahman McKinnon (6-1, 207, r-Fr.)** – 0/83. Played in 12 games and had 11 tackles (6 solo).

- 40 Deon Clarke (6-2, 210, So.)** – 33/71. Played in eight games before being suspended indefinitely by head coach Frank Beamer. Returned for the Sun Bowl. Had 11 tackles (4 solo) this season.

WHIP LINEBACKERS

- 32 Josh Trimble (6-0, 216, r-So.)** – 181/153. Started five games and played in all 13. Registered 20 tackles (5 solo), including 2 for a loss, and a sack.
- 41 Derek DiNardo (6-0, 216, r-Jr.)** – 12/119. Played in all 13 games and had 9 tackles (3 solo). Also recovered a fumble and forced a fumble.

BOUNDARY CORNERS

- 11 Kendall Fuller (5-11, 193, Fr.)** – 691/80. The ACC's Defensive Rookie of the Year by the media and the coaches. A second-team All-ACC selection by the media and the coaches. Started 12 games and played in all 13. Registered 58 tackles (38 solo), including 2.5 for a loss. Led the team with 6 interceptions and also forced a fumble and recovered a fumble.
- 17 Kyle Fuller (6-0, 194, Sr.)** – 438/69. A first-team All-ACC selection by the coaches and a third-team choice by the media. Started eight games and played in nine before being lost for the season with a core injury. Had 24 tackles (17 solo), including 2 for a loss, and 2 interceptions. Also forced a fumble and blocked a kick.
- 2 Donovan Riley (5-11, 204, So.)** – 30/133. Played in all 13 games. Had 3 tackles (1 solo).
- 21 Chris Caver (5-7, 180, r-Jr.)** – 6/0. Played in the Western Carolina game.

FIELD CORNERS

- 31 Brandon Facyon (6-2, 188, Fr.)** – 546/87. A third-team All-ACC choice by the media. Started nine games and played in 12. Finished with 27 tackles (20 solo), including 2 for a loss. Was second on the team with 5 interceptions. Also forced a fumble and recovered a fumble.
- 1 Antone Exum (6-1, 220, r-Sr.)** – 134/1. Started all three games in which he played. Had 4 solo tackles. Injured his ankle in the Miami game and missed the remainder of the season. Had missed the first seven games while recovering from a torn ACL suffered last January.
- 19 Chuck Clark (6-0, 197, Fr.)** – 87/144. Started two games and played in 12. Had 22 tackles (8 solo).
- 48 Nick Bush (5-10, 181, r-Jr.)** – 3/3. Played in the Western Carolina and Miami games.

ROVERS

- 34 Kyshoen Jarrett (5-11, 198, Jr.)** – 735/103.

A third-team All-ACC selection by the coaches and an honorable mention choice by the media. Started all 13 games. Recorded 71 tackles (41 solo), including 1 for a loss, and had 2 interceptions. Returned 26 punts for an average of 5.3 yards per return.

- 26 Desmond Frye (6-2, 188, So.)** – 30/88. Played in all 13 games and had 8 tackles (3 solo).

FREE SAFETIES

- 8 Detrick Bonner (6-0, 194, r-Jr.)** – 756/43. Started all 13 games. Tallied 48 tackles (33 solo), including 2 for a loss, and had 2 interceptions.
- 23 Der'Woun Greene (5-10, 180, r-Fr.)** – 125/94. Played in all 13 games. Had 8 tackles (5 solo).
- 22 T.J. Shaw (5-10, 175, r-So.)** – 3/0. Played in the Western Carolina game.

KICKERS

- 38 Michael Branthover (5-9, 184, Jr.)** – 0/17. Played in five games. Attempted two field goals in the Sun Bowl, making a 22-yarder - his only attempts as a placekicker this season. Made his lone PAT in the Sun Bowl. Kicked off 17 times this season, with three going for touchbacks.
- 22 Eric Kristensen (5-11, 165, Fr.)** – 0/9. Played in the Maryland and Virginia games. Connected on 4 of his 5 field-goal attempts and all four extra-point attempts.
- 89 Cody Journell (5-11, 183, r-Sr.)** – 0/46. Made 10 of his 16 field-goal attempts and 24 of his 26 extra-point attempts before being dismissed from the team for a violation of team rules following the Miami game.
- 29 Ethan Keyserling (6-2, 199, r-Jr.)** – 0/7. Played in the Marshall and Western Carolina games. Missed all three of his field-goal attempts against Marshall while taking over for Journell, who was serving a one-game suspension.
- 30 Mitchell Ludwig (5-11, 192, Fr.)** – 0/37. Played in 10 games. Kicked off 39 times, with 13 going for touchbacks.

PUNTERS

- 27 A.J. Hughes (6-1, 199, So.)** – 0/71. A second-team All-ACC choice by the coaches and the media. Averaged 44.1 yards per punt on 78 punts. Placed 24 inside the 20. Had 22 punts of more than 50 yards.
- 46 Hunter Windmuller (6-3, 185, r-Fr.)** – 0/1. Punted once in the Western Carolina game for 49 yards.

SNAPPERS

- 59 Eddie D'Antuono (6-6, 263, r-Fr.)** – 0/107. Played in all 13 games. Had 3 tackles and recovered a fumble.
- 65 Joe St. Germain (6-0, 220, r-Jr.)** – 0/18. Played in five games.

Needing depth on the offensive line, Tech's coaching staff moved Wyatt Teller to offensive tackle last August, and both he and the coaches think he has a bright future at either of the tackle spots.



READY FOR SPRING

The few members of the 2013 recruiting class who took redshirt years this past fall feel better for the experience, but can't wait for spring practice

by Jimmy Robertson

Like most big-time recruits, Wyatt Teller arrived on campus and expected to play right away as a true freshman. Instead, he found himself sitting in Lane Stadium on Saturday afternoons with some of his other classmates and experiencing odd sensations.

"It was weird," he said. "The first two games, I traveled [with the team]. I was watching it [the game] on the sidelines, and it was so cool looking down and seeing gloves.

"And then all of the sudden, you're in the stands and you don't see a facemask, and you have on regular gloves, but you don't have on football gloves. It was weird. I guess it is what it is."

Virginia Tech's appearance in the Sun Bowl marked the end of the 2013 season, but more importantly to a group of young men who took redshirt years, it marked the end of sitting in the stands on Saturdays and the end of being weekly fodder for the varsity squad while working on the scout team.

Tech's staff played 11 true freshmen this past season – the most in head coach Frank Beamer's tenure. Six members of the 2013 recruiting class saw game action, including defensive backs Kendall Fuller, Brandon Facyson and Chuck Clark, offensive tackle Jonathan McLaughlin, receiver Carlis Parker and tight end Calvin Cline.

Defensive tackle Woody Baron and fullback Jerome Wright, members of the 2012 recruiting class who enrolled in January of 2013, also played, along with walk-ons Sam Rogers (fullback), Mitchell Ludwig (kicker) and Eric Kristensen (kicker).

Only 10 members of the 2013 class took redshirt years. Interestingly, that list included two of the most touted players in the class – Teller and Bucky Hodges, who came to Tech as a 6-foot-5 quarterback out of Virginia Beach, Va. Both arrived on campus with impressive credentials, as both were among the top 50 prospects nationally at their respective positions by most services that cover recruiting.

But by the end of the 2013 season, both found themselves at different positions.

Hodges worked as a quarterback during the early part of the season, but before the Hokies' October game against North Carolina, the coaching staff asked him to work as a tight end on the scout team, wanting him to give a good look as to what the defense would see when facing North Carolina tight end Eric Ebron, an All-American who is forgoing his final year in Chapel Hill and declaring for the NFL Draft.

Hodges looked like a natural at the position – and he stayed there for the remainder of the season.

"I did well, and all the coaches liked it," Hodges said. "I did, too. So now I'm trying to get better at catching, running, blocking – everything.

"We'll see what happens this spring [in spring practice]. It's looking like tight end for me. I'm cool with that. It doesn't matter as long as I get on the field."

Teller, meanwhile, came in as a defensive end. But Tech's defensive line featured plenty of depth and experience this past season, and Teller wasn't going to be able to break into the lineup.

Things weren't as rosy on the offensive line, which lacked depth. Mark Shuman's knee injury complicated matters even more and prompted the staff to ask Teller to move to the offensive line. Teller agreed to it – and plans on staying at offensive tackle.

"I feel that it's the best position for me," he said. "I've put in the time and the work to learn all the plays. There's no point in moving back and forgetting what I've learned.

"But it's all up to the coaches. If the coaches say, 'Hey, we need you at defensive tackle,' then I'll go. We've got a lot of offensive linemen, new kids coming in, and you never know how a coach will approach that. But I'm excited to play and be on the team."

The additions of Teller and Hodges figure



Bucky Hodges came to Tech as a quarterback, but he expects the coaches to move him to tight end this spring, and he's fine with the move.

only to help an offense that struggled with inconsistency for much of the season. Teller and fellow freshmen Parker Osterloh and Kyle Chung, who also took redshirt years, at least add size and depth to an offensive line that struggled to open holes in the running game. Tech returns four starters on the offensive line, but nothing is assured, and Teller got much better by taking on All-ACC defensive end James Gayle every day in practice this fall.

"He's made me better, and I think I've made him a little bit better," Teller said. "He's a great player and a great dude, and we've become close friends. We'll push each other around, just joking. He's never really gotten mad at me, which is great because I'd hate to make him mad. He's a great player and great dude."

Hodges gives Tech much-needed size and athleticism at the tight end spot. This past season, the Hokies used Cline because Ryan Malleck's shoulder injury knocked him out for the season and because none of the others behind Malleck performed well enough on the field.

Malleck comes back for 2014, along with Cline and now Hodges. Offensive coordinator Scot Loeffler likes using tight ends in different formations, and these three give him some weapons. Hodges played tight end before becoming a quarterback, so he's not unfamiliar with the role. He only needs to be a serviceable blocker to be of help at the position. After all, Ebron wasn't known as a great blocker.

"I played tight end before I played quarterback when I was little," he said. "In Pop Warner, I used to play tight end. I love hitting. I used to play defense, too, so I don't mind hitting people.

"I can do a lot of things. I think I'm a little bit faster than him [Ebron], too. They [the coaches] want to see how I do on the field next year."

Tech's offense may also get some help at receiver, with David Prince and Deon Newsome coming off redshirt seasons. Newsome nearly played this past season, but receivers coach Aaron Moorehead elected to hold him out, and Newsome took advantage. He earned Iron Hokie honors in the strength and conditioning program – the second-highest level in the

IHS extra | freshmen finish redshirt season

program behind Super Iron – and he recorded a 300-pound bench press, a 365-pound front squat and a 37.5-inch vertical jump.

The Hokies return every receiver except D.J. Coles, but Prince and Newsome add desperately needed speed on the outside. Outside of Demitri Knowles, the Hokies lacked the speed to attack the field vertically this past season, so Prince and Newsome could help in that area, provided, of course, that they learn the offense well enough to get on the field.

On defense, only three members of the 2013 class projected to play on that side of the ball took redshirt years – linebacker Jamieon Moss, linebacker Andrew Motuapuaka and free safety Anthony Shegog.

Moss and Motuapuaka could figure in the mix at the two linebacker spots this spring, as both Tariq Edwards and Jack Tyler depart. The Hokies see steady backup Chase Williams return, but the other candidates – Deon Clarke, Dahman McKinnon and Drew Burns – are unproven entities. The 240-pound Motuapuaka earned Orange honors in the strength and conditioning program, recording a 365-pound bench press and a 380-pound front squat.

At the two safety spots, the Hokies return starters Detrick Bonner and Kyshoen Jarrett, along with backups Der'Woun Greene and Desmond Frye. But the staff likes Shegog, who, at 6-1, 206 pounds, gives them a little more of a physical presence on the back end. He won Orange honors as well, recording a 315-pound front squat and a 315-pound power clean to go with a 35-inch vertical jump.

One player to watch is a member of the 2012 recruiting class who enrolled last January and took a redshirt year this past season – defensive end Seth Dooley. Dooley serves an example

of how the “grayshirt” process (enrolling in January) works in a perfect world. He enrolled in January and took a redshirt year the following fall. So before he will have played a down at Tech, he will have spent 18 months in Tech’s strength and conditioning program, participated in two spring practices and worked on the scout team for a year. The benefits could be huge for him and the Hokies in the short term and down the road – as they, for example, were for former Tech standout center Jake Grove, who followed the same path.

Dooley, a 6-4, 247-pounder from Salem, Va., made numerous plays in preseason scrimmages, but found himself in the same situation as Teller. The Hokies’ staff played seven defensive ends this past season, leaving little opportunity for the true freshmen to play.

“It was rough because I really wanted to play, but there were a bunch of seniors in front of me,” Dooley said. “I thought of it [redshirting] as a learning period. So I learned from them and learned a bunch of the plays. In a way, I feel like it helped me. Next year, I’ll come in more prepared.”

Sitting out the season is tough on players used to playing every rep, and in many cases, playing every rep on both sides of the ball in high school. But the work done in the strength and conditioning program is invaluable, particularly for linemen, linebackers and tight ends. In general, a player needs more strength, bulk and maturity to play successfully at these positions, whereas defensive backs, like Fuller and Facyson, and receivers find it a little easier to play immediately.

In November, Hodges weighed 235 pounds and Teller weighed 278. Today, those guys weigh 240 and 282, respectively. Teller won Iron

Hokie honors in the strength and conditioning program, while Hodges won Maroon honors. Hodges recorded a 315-pound bench press, a 365-pound front squat and a 300-pound power clean, while Teller had a 405-pound bench and a 410-pound squat. His 375-pound power clean tied the record for an offensive tackle.


Those are strong numbers for two men who hadn’t turned 19 when they tested in these categories.

“It was good,” Teller said of his redshirt season. “In the beginning of the season, I was traveling and then a few more players got healthy, so I had to hang back a little bit. I think it was worth it. I went up against Dadi Nicolas and James Gayle almost every play. That changed everything. My kick step has gotten so much better, and I’m trying to get my pads down. It’s not perfect, but it’s a lot better than where I was at, so it’s all helped.”

Hodges agreed on the benefits of redshirting. “I think it was better for me,” he said. “I got a whole lot better just playing one of the top defenses in the country. Going against them gets you a whole lot better, and I think I got a whole lot better.”

“I’m real anxious for the spring. That’s when you get your money, so to speak. That’s when you get your spot on the field, and I’m looking forward to having good spring practices and a good spring game.”

Tech’s 2013 recruiting class may expand by four for the spring semester, as there were four who planned on enrolling in January. Whether they take redshirt years next fall is to be seen.

Those who did so this fall can share their experiences. They made it through and feel they are better for it. Now, it’s time for a new experience – spring practice – and they can’t wait. 



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Eddie Royal had one of the best seasons of his career as a receiver for the San Diego Chargers and played a large role in helping them into the NFL playoffs. (Photo courtesy of the San Diego Chargers)

SETTLING IN WITH SAN DIEGO

After several injury-plagued seasons, former Tech receiver Eddie Royal bounced back with a big 2013 season in his second year with the San Diego Chargers

by Jimmy Robertson

Many factors lead to NFL players signing free-agent contracts with certain teams – things like money, playing time, familiarity with the organization, offensive or defensive philosophies, genuine admiration for the coaching staff, etc.

In a mid-December phone interview, former Virginia Tech receiver Eddie Royal cited all these as his reasons for signing a deal with the San Diego Chargers in March of 2012.

However, he did leave out one reason – the weather.

“Yeah, it’s the middle of December, and I’m wearing flip-flops and basketball shorts,” Royal said, laughing. “It doesn’t get much better than that.”

The weather marked a stark contrast to the climate in Denver, where he spent the first four years of his NFL career. It also marked a stark contrast to Blacksburg, where he spent four years making big plays for the Hokies.

Many expected Royal to return to the East Coast after his stint with Denver, as he engaged in negotiations with the Washington Redskins that became public. When a media outlet reported that Royal had agreed to terms with the Redskins, it created mass confusion. Royal, who actually had not agreed to terms at the time, found himself inundated with phone calls and texts from people congratulating the Alexandria, Va., native on his return to his old stomping grounds.

“Everyone was so excited,” Royal said. “I even

had my mom, who was in the next room, asking me if I had signed without telling her. She had seen it, or heard about it, on television. I had to calm her down because she was so excited about it. I get a lot of grief about it. Every time I’m back home, I always get a few people saying, ‘I wish you’d signed with the Redskins. We’d love to have you.’

“But it was a tough situation. Washington was the hometown team, and I would be playing for my old coach [Mike Shanahan], so everything pointed toward me signing there. It was tough. I had to take a step back and talk to a few people. We all seemed to think San Diego was the right place.”

Royal chose San Diego in large part because he respected Chargers coach Norv Turner. He used to watch the Redskins when Turner served as their coach, and he liked what he saw – the Redskins threw the ball and got everyone involved.

He also liked that the Chargers had a very good quarterback in Philip Rivers, a strong-armed signal caller with the ability to throw deep. Royal saw the Chargers twice a season because Denver and San Diego resided in the same division (AFC West), so he possessed a familiarity with the organization.

“It seemed like a good situation for me,” Royal said. “They had signed [Robert] Meacham, and they had Malcolm Floyd, and they said I could play in the slot. They also had a Pro Bowl quarterback, and that’s very important when you’re making a decision, especially for a receiver.

“Everything seemed to fit. It seemed like a

good match for me. Just having played against the Chargers and knowing how good of a team they were and how explosive an offense they were ... as hard as it was to leave Denver, it just seemed like a good fit for me.”

Royal signed a three-year contract worth \$13.5 million. Six million of that was guaranteed. The money was similar to the Redskins’ offer, but on a two-year contract. Royal got a little more money and the extra year with the Chargers.

Leaving Denver, though, wasn’t easy. The Broncos drafted Royal in the second round of the 2008 NFL Draft, and as a rookie, he enjoyed a fantastic season, catching 91 passes for 980 yards and five touchdowns.

Injuries hindered Royal for the next three seasons. In his final season with the Broncos, he missed four games because of an injured groin and caught just 19 passes for 155 yards and a touchdown.

Still, he liked everything about Denver and was very much open to returning to the Broncos after his rookie contract expired following the 2011 season.

“It was real tough because it felt like you’re leaving part of yourself,” Royal said of leaving. “The guys that I had come in with, we had developed such a good bond. And my relationships with the coaches and the fans and with the community, it’s a great place. I love it there. I’ll always have great memories.

“I was waiting to see the offer from them ... it just didn’t work out. I don’t want people thinking that I didn’t want to come back because that wasn’t the case at all. It just seemed that San Diego was a smart move for me and a good decision for me and my career.”

Unfortunately, last year was a disaster. Again, injuries took a toll, as he injured his groin again, and his mom became ill, forcing him to make several cross country trips to check in on her. In his first season in San Diego, he played in just 10 games, catching 23 passes for 234 yards and a touchdown.

Team officials decided to fire Turner following the season, leaving Royal wondering about his role. But those same team officials decided to hire Mike McCoy, who just happened to be Royal’s offensive coordinator in Denver.

Royal couldn’t have been happier.

“I knew what to expect,” he said. “I knew what type of coach he [McCoy] was. I knew what he represented and what this team would be all about just based on the type of person he was and what he stood for. I knew that there would be a good environment. We were going to have fun and win a lot of games and throw the ball a lot. Those were things I was excited about. Just knowing the type of coach he was, I knew we’d have some success.”

Royal has enjoyed his best season since the 2010 season when he caught 59 passes for 627 yards.

During the Chargers’ regular season – a four-game winning streak to end the season propelled them into the playoffs – he caught 47 passes for 631 yards and a career-best eight touchdowns. He was tied for first on the team in touchdown catches, fourth in receptions and third in yardage.

Royal caught two touchdown passes in a season-opening loss to the Houston Texans. Then, he added three more touchdown receptions the following week against Philadelphia. That two-game start got him headed in the right direction for the season.

“It was really good to get started like that, especially coming off a year in which I was hurt and I wasn’t really out there much the year before [in 2012],” Royal said. “You want to come in and make a good impression, especially with a new team, and being hurt that first year was really frustrating. I didn’t make the impact I wanted to, so it was great to get off to a good start this season and get things going and start the season on a right note.

“The hot start was because they [the coaches] happened to call my number, and those plays worked. We’ve been spreading the ball around a good amount this whole year. It’s good when you play in an offense like that because defenses can’t key on one guy.”

Royal likes the direction the Chargers are headed under McCoy. He also likes learning from receivers coach Charlie Joyner, a Hall of Fame

receiver in his own right from his days as a Charger. Joyner was a smaller receiver, like Royal, and has helped Royal become a better player.

The 2014 season will mark the last under Royal’s current deal. So he wants to get healthy, stay healthy and become an even better player in the offseason.

Royal, who ranks sixth in career receptions at Tech (119), would love to take some time off and come back to Blacksburg for the spring game. He still keeps in contact with some of the Tech contingent, but scheduling conflicts have kept him from coming to the spring game of late.

“I still keep in touch with [John] Ballein [associate AD for football relations] and Bruce [Garnes, deputy director of football operations],” Royal said. “I think my mom talks to Coach [Frank] Beamer more than me.

“It’s just so hard being on the other side of the map. I wish I could get to a game or even the spring game, but we’ve usually got OTA’s [organized training activities] going on. As much as my heart is there [Blacksburg], and I want to be there, it’s tough to make it back. I wish I could be around more because of what Virginia Tech has meant to me.”

Tech fans understand. They know Eddie Royal. They know San Diego, with its great weather, is his residence these days. But they also know Virginia is his home.

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Tech point guard Devin Wilson had started every game through the first 13 games and dished out no fewer than three assists in every game.

SEASON OF INJURIES TESTING HOKIES

Tech coach James Johnson's squad has been a little inconsistent this season, primarily because injuries have resulted in a lot of lineup shuffling

by Jimmy Robertson

As Virginia Tech entered the meat of the basketball season, starting with a Jan. 7 home game against Syracuse, it had more players visiting the training room than the locker room.

And the roster uncertainty left coach James Johnson exasperated.

"That's been the most disappointing thing of the year so far," Johnson said.

Three Tech players were listed as questionable for the Syracuse game – guard Adam Smith (calf), forward C.J. Barksdale (ankle, knee and flu) and forward Marshall Wood (flu). They unfortunately continued a dubious trend for Johnson, who never seems to know who is going to be available from game to game.

Heading into that Syracuse game, Johnson had used nine different starting lineups in 13 games, and nine different players had started games. Only forward Jarell Eddie and point guard Devin Wilson had started every game this season.

The injury parade started with freshman guard Ben Emelogu, who suffered concussion-like symptoms following a loss to Seton Hall and then missed three straight games. Barksdale, who missed the first three games of this season because of a suspension, missed the Miami game because of a knee injury. Against VCU, he sprained an ankle after seven minutes of action. He then tried to return against UNCG, but was ineffective because of the ankle and played just six minutes.

Smith suffered a calf injury in practice before the Winthrop game and missed that game. He aggravated it against VCU and missed both the UNCG and Maryland-Eastern Shore games.

Not all of the roster issues have been injury related. Before the season started, the NCAA ruled that freshman guard Malik Mueller had failed to meet initial eligibility requirements, thus forcing him out for the season (he's taking a redshirt year). Then Marquis Rankin sat out the first half of the season while working through personal issues. He decided to give up basketball shortly after Christmas.

"You come in and you recruit and you have a pretty good recruiting year. You're thinking about your vision of the way you want to play," Johnson said. "You think in your second year that you'll have an opportunity to play that way. Then certain things happen, starting back with Donte Clark [now at UMass after failing to meet NCAA eligibility requirements] and Malik Mueller, and C.J. Barksdale was suspended for the first three games. Marquis Rankin has his issues and then on and on with the injuries. That's been the most frustrating part of this year.

"The guys we have playing have been doing a heckuva job. We're three or four possessions away from being 11-2. But we can't look back. We've got to move forward. But it's been frustrating not to have the whole group together."

Johnson was most worried about Smith's injury. The redshirt sophomore gives the Hokies some scoring punch (13.1 ppg), and he also serves as the backup point guard behind Wilson. But he hasn't been the same player since late November, and Johnson hopes the calf injury doesn't morph into a year-long problem.

"I'm starting to worry about that," Johnson said. "They [the Tech sports medicine staff]

say it's a tough injury for a little guy like Adam because everything is based on his speed and jumping ability. Jumping and shooting and planting and trying to use quickness ... that's a tough injury for him."

Tech went into the Syracuse game with an 8-5 record, but had lost three games by a combined five points, including two games by a single point.

But Johnson likes the attitude of his players, especially because they never back down.

"They've been great. These young guys are winners," he said. "They come from winning programs, and they want to win. They approach every game like they're going to win it. They work hard in practice. They work hard outside of practice to try and get better and to try to put themselves into position to win. These guys want to win."

EDDIE HELPS TECH SNAP TWO-GAME SKID

Eddie scored 17 points to lift the Hokies past Maryland-Eastern Shore 82-66 on Dec. 31, helping the Hokies snap a two-game losing streak.

Tech was coming off back-to-back losses to VCU and UNCG, and in the UNCG game, Eddie made just 1 of 12 from the floor in scoring a season-low four points. But he made his first shot of the game against UMES and hit 5 of 11 for the game. He made 3 of 6 from beyond the 3-point arc and all four of his free-throw attempts.

"That was good to see him make his first shot, both for him and for the team," Johnson said. "That's sometimes the way he goes. If he can get

his first one to go down, that's good for him. We were able to see a big basket early on."

Eddie also grabbed nine rebounds, coming a rebound short of his fourth double-double of the season.

The Hokies shot 46.4 percent from the floor and 42.1 percent from beyond the 3-point arc. They also made 22 of 28 from the free-throw line.

Emelogu dished out a career-high nine assists. Also, every player who dressed for the game scored at least a point.

BARKSDALE TRYING TO GET HEALTHY

It has been an up-and-down season for Barksdale. He missed the first three games while serving a suspension. Then he injured a knee in practice and missed the ACC opener against Miami. He sprained his ankle in the Hokies' loss to VCU and that limited him to just six minutes against UNCG.

But against Maryland-Eastern Shore, he got back on the court and looked more like his old self. He came off the bench and scored nine points and grabbed six rebounds in 17 minutes. He made 3 of 6 from the floor, including a 3-pointer, and made both of his free-throw attempts.

"He did a great job of getting us going on the glass," Johnson said. "I was glad to be able to see him come out and give us some minutes and be healthy. He's still not 100 percent, but he was

able to come out and give us some energy, and hopefully, that will carry on down the stretch."

WILSON MATCHES CAREER HIGH AGAINST MARYLAND-EASTERN SHORE

Wilson scored 16 points in the Hokies' victory over Maryland-Eastern Shore. That matched his season high. He also scored 16 in the Hokies' 87-82 victory over West Virginia on Nov. 12.

Wilson, who had not scored in double figures in seven of the Hokies' previous eight games, made 4 of 6 from the floor, including a 3-pointer, and he also hit 7 of 8 from the free-throw line. He dished out three assists and grabbed two rebounds.

Heading into ACC play, Wilson had not dished out fewer than three assists in any game this season – a span of 13 games.

ALLEN RETURNS TO CASSELL COLISEUM

Maryland-Eastern Shore's head coach is Frankie Allen, who served as an assistant coach at Tech under Charlie Moir and later as the head coach at Tech from 1987-91 after Moir's resignation. The visit by Allen and his UMES team marked his first to Cassell Coliseum since his days as the Tech coach ended.

Allen, who went 56-61 as the Tech coach, has a difficult job at UMES. His team lost its 24th straight road game and 27th straight game

against a nonconference opponent.

But he remained in good spirits following his team's 16-point loss to the Hokies.

"We tried to play them some zone to maybe help their preparation for Syracuse [Tech's opponent on Jan. 7]," said Allen, who is in his sixth season at UMES. "But our zone is nowhere near what they're going to see against the Orange."

WOOD MATCHES CAREER HIGH AGAINST UNCG

Wood tied his career high with 14 points, but that was about the only bright spot in the Hokies' 55-52 loss to UNCG on Dec. 28 – their first game after the Christmas break.

Wood made just 4 of 13 from the floor, including 2 of 7 from beyond the 3-point arc. He made 4 of 6 from the free-throw line.

Tech frittered away an 11-point lead with 10:06 left in the game. Wood had a chance to tie the game for Tech in the waning moments, but missed a 3-pointer with 3 seconds left to play.

"I thought it was good," Wood said. "I thought it was going in, but it came up short."

"It's very disappointing. We came into the game expecting to win, no question. We just let it slip away."

Tech shot just 36 percent from the floor, and the Hokies also missed 10 free throws in the game. 

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Monet Tellier has teamed with Uju Ugoka to provide leadership for the Hokies as they head into ACC play.



SENIOR LEADERS CONTINUE TO PLAY WELL FOR TECH WOMEN'S BASKETBALL SQUAD

by Marc Mullen

Behind its two senior leaders, the Virginia Tech women's basketball team closed out 2013 on a high note, winning four straight contests to get to the 10-win mark faster than any team since the 2007-08 squad. However, the Hokies have not been as fortunate since the ball dropped on 2014, as they fell in a New Year's Day tilt at Hampton and then lost their ACC opener at Boston College on Jan. 5.

Senior Uju Ugoka has carried the team for most of the season, leading the team in scoring in 11 straight games through the BC loss, a string that dates back to a Nov. 17 win over Bucknell. She has scored in double figures in every game this season except for one, and her 19.1 points-per-game average heading into the start of conference play ranked third in the ACC in scoring.

She's also been pulling down rebounds. Her 10.9 boards a game ranked her fourth in the ACC entering the BC game, and she was just one of four players in the league averaging a double-double.

"Effort. Effort," Tech coach Dennis Wolff said

about Ugoka's tremendous start. "The girl, since she came back in September, has worked as hard as any player I've ever been around, both when we are practicing and when she can go into the gym on her own.

"And she's improved in regard to some of the things that I was concerned about. She's better passing the ball. She's catching it better. She's doing a good job defensive rebounding. So I think, in general, it's all better, just her effort and her will to try and get her to where basketball might be able to take her."

Monet Tellier hasn't been as consistent a scorer as Ugoka this year, but is contributing in all facets of the game, as she is third on the team in scoring, fourth in rebounding, and has sparked the team at much-needed times.

With four minutes left in the game against Michigan State, the Spartans had just tied the game thanks to 12 straight points, but Tellier scored five points in a 10-1 Tech run that she started with a 3-pointer, and the team went on to the victory.

Against USC Upstate, Tellier was held scoreless in the first half, but jump-started the Hokies' offense in the second half with four straight points, as the team beat those Spartans as well.

Then, in the Hokies' 10th win of the season (Robert Morris), Tellier notched her first double-double of the season with 16 points and 11 boards. After leading for 35 minutes, the Hokies found themselves trailing by two and on defense at the four-minute mark. The Charlotte, N.C. native, who leads the team in steals, picked up a loose ball and went in for a layup, sparking another 10-1 run.

"We knew it was going to be a tough game coming in," Wolff said after the Robert Morris game. "We had some opportunities to control the game a little bit better than we did, but we let some slip away. But once they [Robert Morris] took the lead at the four-minute mark, I think our girls made a lot of tough plays for us."

It's been a common theme this season – the team playing well in the second half and down the stretch. They've only been outscored three times

after the break, but are 2-1 in those. Fast starts, though, will be the key as the Hokies head into the meat of the ACC schedule.

UGOKA TIES 35-YEAR OLD RECORD

With her 22-point, 17-rebound effort in the Hokies' 82-33 dismantling of Radford on Dec. 21, Ugoka registered her sixth consecutive double-double, her eighth of the season and the 13th of her Tech career.

With that performance, she became the first Tech player since Karen Garbis to have six straight games with a double-double, as Garbis accomplished the feat during the 1977-78 basketball season (Feb. 9-25).

"I'm just playing hard," Ugoka said in response to her success this season. "I just keep playing like I'm used to playing. I don't change things and just keep playing hard and the game will come. I just look for open shots and take it, or just take it to the rim. I'm just playing more aggressive, no matter how the defense plays me."

The Lagos, Nigeria native's six double-doubles came in home games against Richmond (27 points, 17 rebounds), Presbyterian (12, 12), Michigan State (19, 10) and USC Upstate (27, 13) and in road games at Indiana (32, 11) and Radford.

Of her 14 games played this season, she's failed

to grab at least eight rebounds in just one game – six at Old Dominion (Nov. 11).

PANOUSIS CONTINUES IN HER HELPER ROLE

Through the first month of the season (seven games), freshman Vanessa Panousis was leading the Hokies with a respectable 4.1 assists per game, but since has turned up her game, providing a pair of 10-assist games, and in her next seven games for Tech, she was handing out an average of 5.6 a contest.


She was three assists shy of tying the Tech freshman record for assists in a game set by Lisa Leftwich against VCU in February of 1992. The Sydney, Australia native posted her first career double-double with 15 points and 10 assists in the Robert Morris victory.



Then, at BC in her first Atlantic Coast Conference action, Panousis again had 10 assists, a Tech record by a freshman in an ACC game. She also matched Laura Haskins for the second-most in a single ACC game (at Virginia, Feb. 8, 2009) with the effort and was one shy of Nikki Davis' school record of 11 against North Carolina on Jan. 14, 2010.

Just entering the halfway point of the season, and the ACC portion of the schedule, Panousis, with 68 assists, is on pace to set the freshman





Vanessa Panousis is on pace to set the Tech single-season record for assists by a freshman.

school record for assists in a single season currently held by Carrie Mason (2002-03, 106), and she could be the first player since Amy Wetzel (1999-2000) to reach the 150 mark. 

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Uju Ugoka has carried the Hokies during the early portion of the 2013-14 season, averaging more than 19 points per game heading into ACC play.

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Tech women's basketball player Uju Ugoka followed a winding path to Tech, but that hasn't stopped her from becoming one of the ACC's best players

by Marc Mullen

A person would be hard-pressed to find a more difficult road to playing Division I basketball than the one taken by current Virginia Tech women's basketball player Uju Ugoka. In spite of that road, she is leading the Hokies this season in scoring and rebounding and is poised to post a double-double almost any game night.

Sure, there have been many success stories of players from countries in Africa, ones who have come to colleges in the United States, participated in athletics and earned their degrees. In fact, two basketball players – Cheick Diakite and Nare Diawara, both from Mali – each played for the Hokies' basketball teams (men's and women's, respectively) less than a decade ago.

However, neither of them can claim the same path that Ugoka, a Lagos, Nigeria native, took to get to Blacksburg. She not only crossed the Atlantic Ocean, but also covered most of the states of Texas AND Florida before settling in at Virginia Tech.

Oh, and add in this fact. Ugoka had never picked up a basketball until she was a teenager and she picked it up only because of her own curiosity. Hard work and determination have taken her the rest of the way.

"I was maybe 15 when I started playing basketball," the now 20 year old said. "I saw some tall girls [in the community], and I thought 'I'm kind of the same height as them. Let me see where they are going.' I was playing soccer actually, and I said, 'OK, let me go with them,' and I saw them playing basketball. And, like, the next day, I switched from playing soccer to basketball. So that's how I started playing basketball.

"I just saw them play. I just fell in love with the style, the way they dressed, and everything. I was like, 'Hmmm, I think I'll play this game.' I thought, 'I could play this game,' and I just fell in love with the sport when I saw those girls.

"So I started playing basketball on my own. I had no coach. That was why it took me awhile to learn the fundamentals of the game because I started alone. I had nobody to teach me anything. So that's why, when I got here, I was learning ball handling that you are supposed to learn when you are little. That's what I was learning when I got here."

Ugoka, who was a pretty good soccer player

and actually helped her secondary school to a team title and earned a scholarship for the effort, immediately switched from the national sport of Niagara to a lesser-known sport. But she had the support of her parents.

"My dad actually thought I would play soccer," she said. "He wanted me to go to a soccer academy in Nigeria to brush up on my soccer skills because we won that gold medal. That was when my dad thought, 'Oh, I think my daughter should play sport [sports],' because before that, if I tried to play sport, they didn't want me to play any sport.

"Since then, he gave me the green light to go ahead and play sport. When I told him I switched to basketball, he was like, 'Why?' But then I told him, and he was like, 'It's your choice, OK, cool.' So I started playing basketball, but I had to do everything on my own. I needed to be independent to pursue my dreams. None of them, my family members, have seen me play. They just know that their daughter played basketball."

For a couple years, Ugoka, who is the fifth child of her parents' [Paul and Kate] eight children, would practice, play and learn as much as she could of her new endeavor. She then took part in a Hope4Girls Africa basketball camp in Nigeria. The camp – according to its website – is an organization that is dedicated to the increased participation and empowerment of disadvantaged young African women in sports and education.

She was among about 50 other girls at the camp, but her performance there landed her an opportunity. She and one other girl, Ijeoma Uchendu, were able to bring their talents to the United States. Mobolaji Akiode, a former basketball player at Fordham University, is the founder of the organization and helped the pair relocate to Denison, Texas to play for Grayson College, a community college of about 5,000 students.

"The first day I picked up the ball, I knew that, even though I didn't know what I was doing, I just had the feeling that this sport was going to take me so many places," Ugoka said. "I just had the feeling because, for me to stop soccer

immediately to switch to basketball, I knew it would take me so many places.

"I was invited as one of, like, 50 girls that got to go to the camp and I was one of two girls that she [Akiode] picked to go to school here [in the U.S.]. She got us into the JUCO [junior college], and that's how we got here to the States, with the help of her.

"And my parents, when I got a scholarship, they were so excited and were like, 'Go ahead.' They were like, 'Just go, go, go, go.' And I was like, 'Cool.' So they have been supporting me and making sure I'm playing well, even though they've not watched me play. They pray that I play well."

Still in the infancy stage of her basketball progression, Ugoka played well enough to earn conference player of the year and National Junior College Athletic Association All-America honors after her freshman season with the Vikings. However, Grayson, which currently fields just two sports now (baseball and softball), decided after the 2011 season to disband the women's basketball program.

Ugoka was not deterred, as she picked up where she left off once she transferred to Gulf Coast State in Panama City, Fla., for her sophomore season. Averaging almost a double-double for the Commodores, she was again named an All-American and was a top-three finalist for National JUCO Player of the Year.

With the success came a big decision for Ugoka, who would need to make her third move in as many years if she wanted to continue her playing career. Suitors like Tennessee and Florida State were in contact with her, but she eventually chose Tech.

"I've been to schools and I know what I want and I know where I can play and I know the environment, if I'm needed or if I am not," she said about her commitment to Tech. "So I visited, like, four schools, but when I got here, the coaching staff was nice, and I felt at home.

"I'm so far away from home, so I needed a place that I could call my home. So this school, I thought I could play here. I didn't care if they were highly ranked or not. I just wanted to be confident where I am playing because, when you

are confident, you play good. You play well. And I'm like, 'You know what, I think I'm going to go to Virginia Tech.' That's how I chose it."

Ugoka's first year in Blacksburg was a disjointed one. She had to sit out the first nine games because of an NCAA violation and missed four other games because of an injury. She also was playing for her third different coach and in her third different offense in three years. Not to mention, she was playing in one of the toughest leagues in the country.

But none of that mattered to her. Something instilled by her father when she was young still makes all the difference to her. It comes up in every conversation she has with him and her mom when she is able to call home – which is maybe once every two weeks.

"My dad, first of all, always asked me, 'Do you pray every day?' That's the No. 1 question, and if I don't, oh he's going to be mad at me," she said. "So first of all, do you pray all the time, and he'll tell me the Bible verse to read, and he just tells me 'Every day, work hard. I don't care. I just want you to always work hard because hard work pays.' That's what he always says.

"Then my mom will ask me how I'm doing. That's how moms are. My dad will ask, but he'll first of all start with that. Then my mom will ask how am I doing, am I OK, how's everything

going. She just wants to know how I am faring."

Ugoka's parents do not need to worry if she is working hard every day because her success this season is indicative of that. She is currently one of just four players in the ACC averaging a double-double, and on one occasion, she was named the conference's player of the week.

In postgame interviews, she is constantly asked what has been the difference for her this year as opposed to last, and she continues to repeat the same answer night after night. It's not because she's trying to dodge the question. It's because she believes in telling the truth.

She believes that hard work – for example, working out every day – will get the results, and not some miracle pill.

"Mine is just determination," Ugoka said. "I know that I have to work twice as hard as I can to be able to compete. I know that I have to work harder every day, just put in more determination and use my athleticism and how fast I am. Just use what I have to get what I want and then work on the rest that I don't have. So just work extra hard, like twice as much, in order to reach the level I need to be.

"But also being healthy is the No. 1 key because, when you are healthy, you can play as well as you can play. I'm a face-up 4 [power forward], so the offense really, really fits what


I do. It's kind of blending together. Working harder at the same time and just letting the game come and just play freely. Have fun and play the game, but work hard at the same time."

It really is a remarkable story. Ugoka comes to the United States, attends three different colleges, will still graduate on time this May with a degree in sociology – in fact, she won't even be 21 before she is handed her diploma – and credits nothing but the hard work she puts in every day.

"I learned that back home," she said. "We don't joke about academics back home, and the Mobolaji's camp, too, will tell you, not just basketball. Education really matters. So I've been putting that in the back of my head. You have to work hard in your education, too.

"So wherever I go to, I put in the effort, not just in basketball, but also in my education to get a good degree and play well at the same time. That's been helping me, and I'm going to be graduating at an early age, so it's kind of cool. I will have a longer career."

That career she hopes will start with playing professional basketball somewhere, but the part after she says, "will take care of itself."

And with the way she's approached the past six years, wherever she ends up and whatever she puts her mind to will no doubt get her unconditional resolve. 

GETTING TO KNOW UJU UGOKA

Q: What do you do in your free time?

UU: "I like to watch movies, and I sleep. I love both. But 80 percent of the time, I watch movies. I love cartoon movies and also Nigerian movies. I love them, even though you can tell what's going to happen. I still love watching them. Then, I watch others, like the Disney movies, 'Sleeping Beauty' ... I love all those movies."

Q: How's the Blacksburg weather compared to what you're used to?

UU: "It's cold! I don't notice it as much as last year because last year was my first time experiencing the cold. Not the snow, because surprisingly it snowed in Texas, but last year, I actually experienced what cold was. It was really, really freezing. But this year, I'm kind of adjusting to it. Like now, the Australians [her Tech teammates from Australia] are experiencing what I did

last year. So that's funny, but I'm getting used to it."

Q: Have you become accustomed to the food yet?

UU: "I'm still trying to. I can eat it, but not as much as I can eat if I'm eating my country food. And my country food, I can eat and eat and eat until I can't even move. But here, I can't really eat as much, but I can eat it. I still have to eat something in order to play."

Q: How much sightseeing have you been able to do while traveling with the team?

UU: "Not much. We go straight to the hotel. We stay inside. Then from the hotel, we go to the basketball gym, and then after that, we leave. Unless we are driving with the bus, then I get to look around, but no sightseeing. When we went to New York to

watch the men [in the Coaches vs. Cancer Classic at the Barclays Center in Brooklyn], we did stop by Manhattan and saw the big screens [at Times Square], or where they have all the big screens. That was very, very fun."

Q: What was the big breakthrough you had when you came to Virginia Tech?

UU: "When I was little, I knew I couldn't see good, but like, you know what, whatever. So I was playing basketball without contacts, but I never knew I couldn't see. So when I got here, coaches were like, 'Hey, Uju, what's wrong with you? Why are you squinting your eyes?' I guess I can't see. So they get me the contacts, and I could see clearly. I was like, 'Oh my gosh, I must have been blind.' So if I take the contacts off, now I know what I couldn't see. I was playing like half blind."

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Junior runner Thomas Curtin has dominated the 5,000-meter race at the ACC meet of late, winning both the indoor and the outdoor event last season.

DESPITE LOSING TOP-END TALENT, HOKIES FEEL THEY ARE ON TRACK

Dave Cianelli, Tech's director of track and field and cross country, thinks the men's track and field team could make another run at an ACC title this season and that back-to-back good recruiting classes have the women's team much improved

by Marc Mullen

Heading into the 2014 ACC indoor and outdoor track and field seasons, Virginia Tech has seen its men's and women's programs haul in seven first-place team finishes, six runner-up finishes and three third-place finishes in the past 14 conference championship meets.

On the heels of those accomplishments, and with the addition of three new schools into the field, Director of Track and Field and Cross Country Dave Cianelli likes where both teams currently stand and the direction those teams are headed.

Before breaking down each programs' different areas, Cianelli answered several key questions about the upcoming seasons.

Question 1: In regards to both the men's and women's sides, how does the expanded ACC affect Virginia Tech?

DC: "Well, the new schools coming in – Syracuse, Notre Dame and Pittsburgh – it's going to make it tougher. Those are three very good programs. Two of which, Notre Dame and Syracuse, are more distance oriented, with Notre

Dame being more like us in terms of a balanced program. Syracuse is very strong in distance [events], while Pittsburgh is more sprints and hurdle heavy.

"What it's going to do is make the conference much deeper across the board, and it's going to be more difficult even to be in the top eight to score. I'm not sure how much that will affect the top end – the top three or four places – but it will definitely affect the places between five and 10, the spots that are fighting for a few points, and that's really where the difference is in the team race. A lot of times, it's not necessarily how many firsts you get, but how many of the kids you bring to the meet and how many of them can pick up a few points. That is really where it makes a difference."

Question 2: With the expanded field, will there be any changes to the scoring at the ACC meet?

DC: "I did hear that about swimming [that sport is scoring more places at the ACC meet], but that didn't come up at our coaches' meeting. We

pretty much follow the NCAA format, scoring the top eight places. One thing that we did change, though, was expanding the All-ACC selections from the top three to the top eight, which is a really good move. We now recognize more students. Again, to score in our conference is going to take a very good effort, a good performance, so it's worth it to recognize those athletes."

"But as far as [team] scoring goes, it will mirror what our NCAA meet does, and that's the top eight. And that won't change our strategy as far as how we approach an ACC meet. We'll pretty much do what we've done. We will try to bring as much balance to the meet. We'll be strong in our typical areas – vaults, throws, middle distance – so at a conference level, the more balanced you can be with quality, the better chance you have."

Question 3: Over the past decade, six student-athletes have combined to win 14 national titles for Tech. Outdoor hammer throw national champion Tomas Kruzliak returns for the Hokies, but is there anyone else who can contend?

DC: "I think Martina Schultze [four-time All-American, three-time ACC champion] is in a good position. She was third at the indoor meet last year, and she will certainly be in the mix as one of the top in the country in the women's pole vault. She has a legitimate chance to win a national title. Depending on his health, Jaka Muhar, who is a javelin thrower and had offseason surgery on his heels, is talented enough, if he is 100 percent, to be in the mix for javelin title [during the outdoor season]."

"Tomas, again, in the hammer will be right there. It's obviously not a 'gimme.' There'll be other athletes right there with him. We also have a freshman javelin thrower, Eva Vivod, who needs to be more consistent. But if she does, she'll be right there at the national level. So those four individuals could contend, as could others, if everything comes together for them at the right time."

Question 4: The men's side lost so much top-end talent off of last year's team. What are your expectations for the Hokie men for the upcoming season?

DC: "We have a strong enough team on the men's side to be in the mix for the ACC title, both during the indoor and outdoor seasons, if basically everyone stays healthy. Health is going to have a lot to do about it, and that's the big key in our sport – keeping everyone healthy."

"We lost some outstanding seniors from last year – really all-time greats for us in Jeff Artis-Gray, Ronnie Black, Alexander Ziegler, Matthias Treff, Will Mulherin and Michael Hammond. Some of those guys were maybe the best we've ever had in their events. We really had a great senior class last year, but we have a lot of new faces in freshmen and transfers, and I think there's a lot of talent there. It's just a matter of getting them adjusted to the level of training and the competition."

"I'm really excited about the freshmen. I think it's one of the best classes we've ever had on both the men's and women's side since I've been here, and I expect them to make their mark their first year. And we will have to get that in order to challenge the top teams in the conference."

Question 5: The women's roster is loaded with underclassmen and seems poised to make some serious strides over the next few seasons. Is that an accurate assessment?

DC: "The last couple of years, especially our last two recruiting classes with the women – the current freshman and sophomore classes – I'm very excited about collectively. We are pretty young still. We don't have many seniors, and if we can continue to recruit the level of athlete we've gotten over the past couple of years, then there is

no question that the women's program, next year, is in a position to challenge for a conference title. And this year, I'd like to see them move back up into the top three or four as a precursor for the following year.

"The talent level we have in the younger classes on the women's side is really the best we've had since the Queen Harrison, Kristi Castlin group when they came through. This group is as good, but we really won't know until they compete here. Queen's class, overall, was the best class we ever had at one time if you look at what they were able to accomplish. This class has that kind of talent. Now it's a matter of if they can move on and do some of those same things. That remains to be seen."

"We are on our way. I think we're going to take a big step from where we were last year in the conference and on the national level, and with another year and a really strong recruiting class, then I think we can be in that mix again. This team, collectively, we are going to be a much stronger conference team than we were a year ago. We're definitely on an uptick."



Darrell Wesh



Tihut Degfae

MEN'S SPRINTS/HURDLES/JUMPS

Top returners (2013 accomplishments): Senior Darrell Wesh – Indoor: 60-meter first-team All-American, finalist at the ACC meet and a school record holder; Outdoor: 100-meter NCAA qualifier and All-ACC (finished second), 200-meter ACC champion, 4x100 All-ACC (team finished second).

Sophomore Tadashi Pinder – Indoor: 4x400 All-ACC (team finished third), 60-meter finalist at the ACC meet; Outdoor: 4x100 All-ACC (team was second), 100-meter and 200-meter finalist at the ACC meet.

Newcomers: Sophomore Marcus Finney and freshmen Alex Ellison, Alex Merritt, Rafael

MEN'S DISTANCE

Top returners (2013 accomplishments): Senior Tihut Degfae – Indoor: DMR [distance medley relay] second team All-American, 800-meter ACC champion; Outdoor: 800-meter All-ACC (finished third).

Senior Leoule Degfae – Indoor: 3,000-meter finalist at the ACC meet; Outdoor: 5,000-meter and 10,000-meter finalist at the ACC meet.

Junior Thomas Curtin – Indoor: 5,000-meter ACC champion, set the school record; Outdoor: 5,000-meter ACC champion.

Junior Grant Pollock – Indoor: DMR ACC champion; Outdoor: 1,500-meter NCAA qualifier and ACC champion.

Newcomers: Freshmen Vincent Ciattei, Neil Gourley and Patrick Joseph.

Cianelli's take: "We have some really good depth and some outstanding freshmen who are no doubt part of the best class we've ever signed. Vincent Ciattei is a top miler out of Maryland, and Patrick Joseph is a top middle distance guy out of Virginia. Those guys are like 4:07 milers out of high school, and if they continue to develop, they are going to be at a level sooner to where a guy like Michael Hammond was. But we'll have to wait and see."

"Along with two other guys – Neil Gourley, whom we signed from Scotland, and Griffin Carmichael, another Virginia guy – collectively, this is the best quality we've ever signed. I'm really excited what they will add to our returnees Tee and Lee Degfae, Grant Pollock and Tommy Curtin, who could be one of the best we've ever had here at Virginia Tech if he continues on the course he's on."

"With the influx of these freshmen, and even with the loss of Will Mulherin, Jason Cusack and Mike Hammond, I think this group can be as good or even better, all depending on how those freshmen develop. This group, when looking at last year's indoor, the distance crew overachieved, at least in what I expected, but I think they were the ones who made the difference in winning that title."



Tomas Kruzliak

MEN'S THROWS

Top returners (2013 accomplishments): Sophomore Tomas Kruzliak – Indoor: weight throw second-team All-American and All-ACC (finished second); Outdoor: hammer throw national champion and ACC champion.

Sophomore Jaka Muhar – Outdoor: javelin finalist at the ACC meet.

Newcomer: Sophomore Jordan Roach.

Cianelli's take: "We're probably a little thinner here than we've been, particularly during the indoor season, because we'll only have two in the weight throw. We might have one in the shot [put] in transfer Jordan Roach, who is primarily a discus thrower. But he has thrown the shot a little

bit. Over the past few years, we've been able to sweep the weight throw at the ACC meet. So we'll have to make that up in other areas this year."



Chris Uhle

MEN'S POLE VAULT

Top returners (2013 accomplishments): Junior Chris Uhle – Indoor: finalist at the ACC meet; Outdoor: second-team All-American, All-ACC (finished second).

Senior Stephan Munz – Indoor: ACC champion.

Newcomer: Freshman Torben Laidig.

Cianelli's take: "Our vault group is going to be very deep, as it typically is, and will be led by Chris Uhle and Stephan Munz, and both should be battling in the ACC meets and nationally."

"Jared Allison and Brad Johnson are two returning athletes in that event, and we'll look to them to back Chris and Stephan, especially at the conference level. We've traditionally scored a lot of points in the event, and we'd like to continue to do that."

"In January, Torben Laidig, who's from Germany, will step in and be able to help us out right away. He's got a personal best of 17 feet, 1 inch. So this crew will be very deep and can help us earn more points than in years past."



Ciara Simms

WOMEN'S SPRINTS/HURDLES/JUMPS

Top returner (2012 accomplishments): Redshirt sophomore Ciara Simms – Indoor: 60-meter finalist at the ACC meet; Outdoor: 4x100 NCAA qualifier and All-ACC (finished

third), 100-meter finalist at the ACC meet.

Newcomers: Freshmen Christine London, Nora McKiver and Jasmine Mitchell.

Cianelli's take: "Our sprinters are very young, with Ciara Simms returning after redshirting last year. She's a 60, 100 performer and made the ACC finals in both of those events. So I expect the same out of her and Yeni Aromolaran, who had a really nice freshman year last year."

"Then we have a really nice freshman class in Christine London, a top hurdler from Maryland, Nora McKiver, another top hurdler from North Carolina, and Jasmine Mitchell, who is an all-around athlete and is going to be a 400-meter runner for us. She might surprise some people in that event."

"It's a young group, but I think they are on their way to doing some really great things, and we are about a year away from having some depth in that area."

WOMEN'S DISTANCE

Top returners (2013 accomplishments): Sophomore Shannon Morton – Indoor: DMR finalist at the ACC meet; Outdoor: 1,500-meter finalist at the ACC meet.

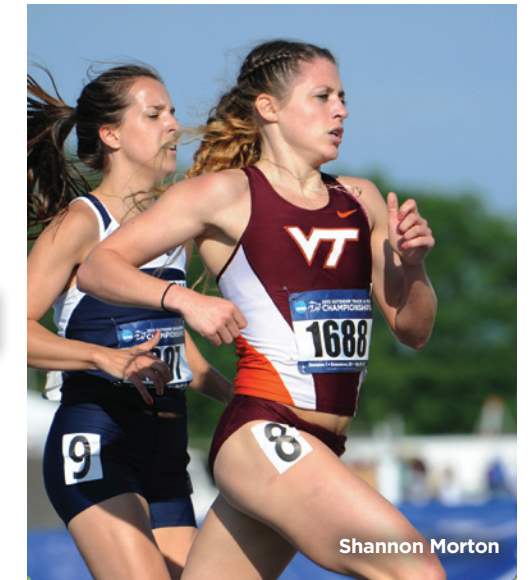
Junior Amanda Smith – Indoor: 800-meter finalist at the ACC meet; Outdoor: 800-meter finalist at the ACC meet, a school record holder.

Junior Katarina Smiljanec – Indoor: DMR finalist at the ACC meet; Outdoor: 1,500-meter finalist at the ACC meet.

Junior Sarah Rapp – Indoor: 3,000-meter and 5,000-meter finalist at the ACC meet; Outdoor: 5,000-meter finalist at the ACC meet.

Newcomers: Freshmen Hanna Green and Abigail Motley.

Cianelli's take: "Our middle distance group is about as good as we've ever had. Shannon Morton, Amanda Smith and Katarina Smiljanec



Shannon Morton

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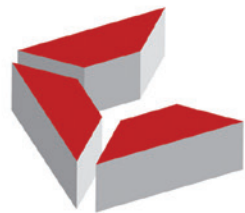
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all return, and all were finalists at last year's ACC outdoor meet. Hanna Green will be a good 800-meter runner for us. I think that 800, 1,500 group is going to be good. That is where our strength is going to be.

"At the longer distances, Courtney Dobbs and Sarah Rapp just finished outstanding cross country seasons, and that typically bodes well for track. Those two will be the leaders, but Frances Dowd, Madalyn Nuckols and freshman Abigail Motley will be in the mix.

"I really like this group, and if they can stay healthy, I think they can accomplish a lot. So I see them contributing more this year at the conference level."



Annjolie Vester

WOMEN'S THROWS

Top returner (2013 accomplishments): Junior Annjolie Vester – Indoor: weight throw finalist at the ACC meet; Outdoor: hammer throw second-team All-American, ACC champion.

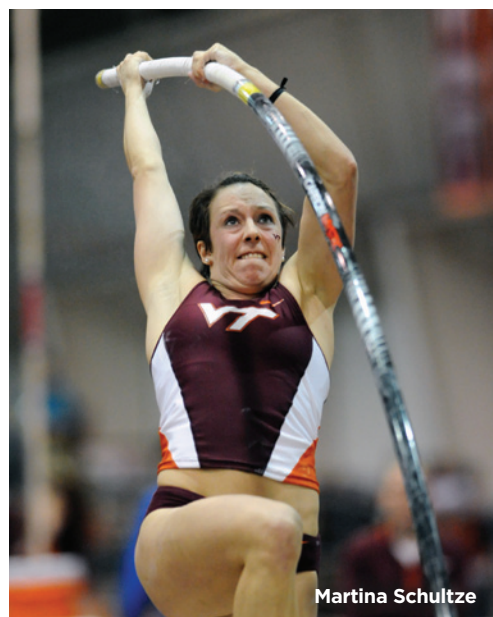
Junior Sarah Kadelka – Outdoor: javelin finalist at the ACC meet.

Newcomers: Junior Sabine Kopplin and freshman Eva Vivod.

Cianelli's take: "In the throws, Sabine Kopplin and Sarah Kadelka will be strong for us in the javelin. Sabine redshirted last year, so this will be her first year here, but she'll be one of the favorites, and Sarah was an ACC scorer in the event.

"Annjolie is back for her junior year, and she's won the hammer at the conference meet two years in a row. So those are our centerpieces, and our top recruit is Eva Vivod, who also

throws the javelin. Her and Sabine could be at the top of the NCAA level. Both of them have the tools and the credentials to be the tops in the country. They will give us a really deep crew in the javelin come the conference meet."



Martina Schultze

WOMEN'S POLE VAULT

Top returner (2013 accomplishments): Junior Martina Schultze – Indoor: first-team All-American (finished third), ACC champion; Outdoor: first-team All-American (finished eighth), ACC champion.

Newcomers: Freshmen Emma King and Kristen Lee.

Cianelli's take: "Our group in the pole vault will certainly be very deep, again, as it has been, with Martina leading that group as a returning All-American. But she's got a really good supporting crew. Senior Leigh Allin returns for her final year, and there are Lyndsey Saunders and Erinn Schaal. I expect those individuals to be in a position to score at the ACC meets.

"Then Emma King and Kristen Lee, who are both multiple state champions, I can see those two contributing right away. This event, conference-wide, is the best it's ever been. It's deeper, and there is more quality, so it will take really good performances to score at the meet."

Tech opened the indoor season at the Appalachian State Invitational on Dec. 5-6 in Boone, N.C. The ACC Championships will be held in Clemson, S.C., on Feb. 27-28, and the NCAA Championships will be held March 14-15 in Albuquerque, N.M. The ACC's outdoor meet will be held in Chapel Hill, N.C., on April 17-19, and the NCAA's outdoor meet will be held June 11-14 in Eugene, Ore.

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